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[PHILIP DESMOND FOUND KIT KNEELING ON THE GROUND BENDING OVER CONSTANCE'S HUDDLED FORM.]

K I T.

CHAPTER XIV.

The position regarding Kit was one that gave Constance Marlowe much food for thought. In fact it was so pressing as to disturb her sleep and upset her appetite.

"Why must she choose to be with a woman who is not only a great friend but a relative of the one man she must not meet," that was Constance's impatient query all the time. It was so annoying. Nothing could have been better than for the girl to have gone down into the country if only she had gone with anyone except the old lady with whom she was. Constance thought very deeply, while she brushed her soft brown hair the morning after that dinner at the Leith's. There was much that was pleasant to ponder over. She had certainly done a very good thing in having arranged to be Sybil's bridesmaid, and Sir Philip had expressed the most charming interest in this fact. He had seemed very glad to see her too, and they had sat for quite

half-an-hour in the conservatory chatting together. All this was delightful, also the fact that he had offered his services to see her safely home, and had driven in a hansom with her up to her friend's house.

Yes, this was all very nice and very satisfactory, but it made the question of Kit only the more difficult, for Sir Philip had by no means forgotten the "red-haired little witch," whom he had chanced to see that bygone morning, and he had asked a good many questions concerning this same little witch's welfare at school, and of her progress there altogether.

"And I suppose she will be coming out into the world next year?" he had said, "very probably."

She parted and brushed back her soft, pretty hair in the Madonna fashion in which she always wore it, and she looked at herself in a cold, calculating sort of way, as she stood before her mirror.

There was no denying her beauty—it was absolute. Few women could lay claim to such charms as she possessed, and yet it was bitter mortification to a nature like Constance's to

have to acknowledge to herself she was not a success.

She had her admirers of course, in fact, every one always admired her; but in the several cases where she had desired most to attract, and had given most thought and hope, Constance had always failed—Philip Desmond was not the first man whom she had wished to marry for position, or some other reason; but with none of the others had her hope been so strong, her desire so keen, as with him. Each day the prospect of a future as his wife grew more and more desirable. She wanted to be married now, she was weary of her mother and of her life in general, and her ambitious mind pictured a series of social triumphs when, as Lady Desmond, wife to one of the most distinguished and celebrated men of the day, she should take her high place in the world of fashion, rank, and wealth.

Her heart beat fast as she conjured it all up, and then she grew suddenly cold and faint as she remembered now by one mischance the whole magnificent future could be spoiled and lost to her for ever.

She felt assured that Philip Desmond would

never even take her hand in friendship again, could he know for a certainty that she had told him, not one, but a succession of deliberate falsehoods, and then added to the circumstance of Kit's departure from the Limes, did not, Constance was well aware, reflect to the best advantage on her. She had not troubled herself in the very least about what sort of life the young girl would have to face, she had shown neither womanly interest or cousinly sympathy in the matter. It had suited her purposes to get Kit away safely and swiftly, and she had snatched at the first chance that suggested itself to her, without giving a thought to Kit's feelings in any way whatever.

No; the clearer these things came before Constance, the more certainly did she determine she must prevent the knowledge of them ever reaching Philip Desmond's ears, until at least she had secured for herself the future she so much desired. But how must she act? What do?

She sat a long time staring at herself in the glass, for once blind to her own reflection, lost in her confused and confusing thoughts.

She rose at last hurriedly.

She must go down to the country and see Kit. It was the best plan, and there was no time so lost, it was already midday. As she drove to the station, Constance was busy concocting the story best likely to work her will, and get her cousin away from Lady Milborough. Somehow she felt she would not have an easy task, the tone of Kit's letter had been a revelation to her, shewing her that there was a great deal more in the girl's character and nature than she had ever troubled herself to imagine could be possible.

What if Kit should refuse to consent to her proposal?

Constance set her small teeth, and clenched her hands. Having fixed her mind on working, at all hazards, a prevention of a meeting between Kit and Philip, she would not relinquish this easily. She was clever enough to know the best way to work with her cousin, she knew how the girl had always responded to affection. Soft words she was certain would win her all she required, and then she would only have to touch on Kit's gratitude, and the game was her's absolutely.

Lady Milborough's house was situated some distance from the country station, and Constance had to charter a fly to reach there. The beauties of the quaint old place were completely lost on her, she cared for none of them. She was longing, as she had never longed before, to see her cousin's form with the hair that was grown so objectionable to her, and the fathomless eyes which stirred her jealousy into being.

She alighted at the old-fashioned porch, a dainty vision in her smart, summer gown, and asked in her sweetest way to be allowed to see Kate Lowe, who had just come to reside beneath Lady Milborough's roof. The bairn, grey-haired in his well-loved mistress's service, gazed with much admiration at Miss Marlowe.

He answered that Miss Lowe was at present with her ladyship, who was unfortunately not very well, and was compelled to remain in her room, if the young lady would kindly come in and wait, he would send up and inform Miss Lowe a visitor wished to see her.

Constance followed him into the long low-roofed drawing room, with its white-draped windows opening on the lawn, and its atmosphere scented with roses.

She was a little nervous and not at all comfortable. It was a strange feeling, but she felt all at once as though she were afraid of her interview with Kit.

She walked restlessly about the room looking at the pictures and curios scattered about in a congealed fashion yet seeing none of them, and then the door opened and Kit came in.

Was it Kit?

Constance was amazed into momentary silence by the girl's appearance. It was not

only the pretty pink cotton frock (one of several gowns that Sybil Leith had insisted on providing for her friend) that enhanced to a marvellous degree the exquisite tint of the clear pale skin and the masses of deep coppered hair—it was the change in Kit's whole bearing, the like head borne as proudly as though she were a queen over a vast empire, the lips that were smileless, the eyes full of some subtle expression, which Constance could not understand in the very least, all spoke of a marked change.

They stood in silence for a moment, and then Constance laughed a little awkwardly.

"Well, Kit, are you not going to say you are glad to see me? I have come a long way to pay you this visit."

Kit came a little further forward into the room, and stood with one hand resting on a chair back.

"It is very good of you," she said, gently. She paused a moment. "You want me to do something, Constance?" she asked, in the same tone after that pause.

Constance Marlowe flushed hotly. What had come to Kit? The transformation in the girl was little short of marvellous. She felt more and more assured of the difficulty of the task before her, but she was none the less determined to carry it through.

Kit in this altered condition was something infinitely more dangerous than Constance dared to realize. Her jealousy leaped into a fiercer flame than before. She had hard work to control it. Her lips showed white and thin as she smiled.

"Must I necessarily want something because I have come to see you, Kit? You are not very kind, I must say."

Kit's lips quivered an instant then grew firm.

"I am sorry if I seem unkind," she answered. "I do not mean to be so, Constance, but—"

Her pause was eloquent. It said as clearly as words, "But I do not quite understand why you who have never taken the faintest trouble for or about me all this time should all at once pay me a visit which demands a long and tedious journey unless you require something of me."

Constance completely comprehended that pause. She immediately lost her temper, and, in consequence, changed her tactics. What use to annoy herself by acting a part which would have no effect? She threw herself into an easy chair and laughed shortly.

"I had not given you credit for so much discrimination," she said, coldly and quietly, "but as you have shown me you possess it in a well-developed degree, and I may as well be frank, you are right. I do want you to do something, and that is why I am here. I desire you to leave this place immediately, and return to London with me this afternoon!"

Kit started a little in surprise, and the colour flashed into her cheeks. She looked very beautiful in this moment. She did not speak immediately.

"You wish this—why?" she asked, when she did speak.

"I have very good reasons," Constance answered, shortly.

"I should like to hear them," Kit said, very quietly.

The cousins gazed at each other in silence for a moment. Constance measured swords with Kit in that glance, and at the realisation that her power over the girl was gone her jealousy and dislike augmented by her fear of consequences became definite hatred.

"I do not recognise your right to ask this," she said, haughtily, and with a touch of her mother's autocratic manner. "What I do recognise is my right to claim the result of the gratitude you expressed so fluently when you had need of my help the other day."

"You will not find me ungrateful, Constance."

Kit was very pale now.

"Give me your reasons for asking me to do this thing, and if it be possible with my sense of duty and honour I will act as you desire."

Constance got up and walked about the room swiftly. She was very angry.

"I have no other reason to give you, except that it is my wish you should leave this house. I don't know what sense of duty or honour can be clearer than that which is due to me, not only as the person who helped you in your hour of need, but as the daughter of my mother on whose bounty you have lived so many years."

Kit looked at her cousin fall out of her magnificent eyes.

"You have chosen the wrong argument, Constance," she said in low, yet clear tones, her hand resting on the oaken chair, trembled a little, and her heart beat fast and heavy under her pink bodice, she was pale to her very lips, "to conjure by taunts of my long dependence is not likely to be successful. I do not need you to teach me where my duty and honour lies. I have never failed in either where you or your mother has been concerned. I am no longer a dependent. I live no longer on charity. For the bread I have received, the clothes I have worn I have ever been grateful; but pride is as great as gratitude, and I shall be able, please Heaven, to repay your mother every penny she has expended on me before many years have gone. For you I realise how poor a thing your aid to me was. Had you not need of me now you would not remember I was even alive. I gave you, Constance, more love and sincere admiration in the past than you can possibly have known."

"I have loved you as though you were my sister. I have been so proud of you I have believed in you!"

"I would not let myself think you were cold and hard, but facts are indisputable witnesses. You have yourself torn down the veil from my eyes and shown me what you really are."

"You are my kinswoman, but there is no affection in your heart for me. It will be better for us that we do not meet again, our paths in life are far apart, we can be free of one another, and it will be happier so."

Constance listened in the silence that beamed intense anger.

"You refuse—you refuse!" she said hotly. "You will not do what I ask!"

Kit was very quiet and firm.

"Give me your reason for asking this, and as I said just now if it is possible I will do what you want, but," her voice faltered. "I have received more kindness, more tenderness in the week I have been beneath this roof than I have ever thought it possible I should know. Lady Milborough has need of me. Unless your reason is most powerful I cannot—I will not give her pain and disappointment by leaving her when I am likely to be a comfort to her. Surely," she smiled, faintly, "surely you must yourself see that what I ask is not only reasonable but right. I am not a free agent now. I have accepted an engagement I must fulfil, unless some most urgent circumstances arise to prevent me. Tell me why you wish me to leave Lady Milborough in this sudden way, and—"

"You had no right to come here. You should have consulted me first. You were very well off where you were. It was disgraceful to have done what you did, to have worn your way into Sybil Leith's most foolish generosity, and—"

Kit put out her hand.

"Stop!" she said quietly, imperiously. "Stop! You shall say no more to me! You have said already too much."

Constance's face, grown crimson in her hotly uttered speech, turned suddenly pale.

She stood silent an instant, and then moved slowly towards Kit. She was hardly sane in this moment—the absolute realisation that she had failed, and failed, too, chiefly through her own bad management, infuriated her into another being.

In all the years Kit had known her cousin she had never seen her like this before. Even

the delicate beauty seemed gone with that hard wild look in place of her ordinary gentle softness. Constance seemed an old and almost plain woman.

Her lips moved but no words came, the vehemence of her anger paralysed her speech, and she stood there with Kit gazing at her in pain and sorrow mingled—a man's voice, sounding clear and hearty, came to their ears.

"All right, Mason, I'll have a cup of tea out here. It's cooler outside, and you can send up and tell her ladyship I am here. Tell her not to hurry about seeing me for an hour or so as I have brought down my traps and shall stay the night."

The speaker came into view as he finished. He had passed through the old hall, and was emerged now on to the lawn just in front of the open windows.

As the sound of this voice came to Constance Marlow's ears she gave a great start; her breath came from her ashen lips in gasping sight.

She stretched out her hand in a blind helpless fashion, and as Kit started forward to seize it eagerly, and in much fear, Constance's anger, fear, and sudden horror slipped from her comprehension in a curious dream-like fashion, she staggered and fell against Kit's slender form; and as Philip Desmond turned, hastily startled by her sudden cry, he found her kneeling trembling on the ground bending over a huddled woman's form, whose white face looked almost deathlike in its rigid pallor.

CHAPTER XV.

If Constance had planned out a series of the most dramatic and effective situations to assist her in the awkward moment she had been dreading so much, none of them could have possibly been more successful than this more hearsed scene which puther at once into a position that not only demanded, but obtained Philip Desmond's sincere sympathy and interest.

Kit's supernatural calmness deserted her as she saw her cousin's weakness; tears started to her lovely eyes, she was in great distress. Sir Philip's astonishment at seeing her was lost upon her, she could think of nothing but Constance; and her tender heart was full of remorse for having received her cousin so coldly.

She became the Kit of old in this moment, natural unrestrained, letting the whole beauty of her true woman's nature have full vent. The evil influence brought by Maurice's cruelty was gone for the time.

Philip saw and took heed everything. He was touched by her distress, and his ready aid won him a word of thanks and a glance from her beautiful troubled eyes.

Curbing his natural astonishment at coming so unexpectedly upon Miss Marlowe in a fainting condition under his kinswoman's roof, and upon the "little red-haired witch" whose face he had never been able to forget, Sir Philip proved himself a most skilful nurse and physician.

He lifted Constance with no very great difficulty, for he was very strong, and her weight was not great, from the ground to a couch, which he wheeled up to the window, to get more air; and he stood looking down at Kit as she knelt beside the couch, trying all in her power to restore consciousness to the pale, still face, with eyes that seemed as though drawn by magnetic power.

How lovely the child was—something more beautiful than he had ever yet seen in all his varied life. In a dreamy sort of way he seemed to feel no very great surprise at meeting her again, even though the meeting had come so unexpectedly.

It seemed to him now that she had always been in the gallery of his thoughts, most cherished pictures. It was almost natural to be gazing down on her, to watch her graceful

movements, and realise her exquisitely young individuality.

He had rung for maids, and there was a flutter to and fro in the old room, and after awhile, Constance opened her eyes, staring in a dazed way at first, and then smiling faintly as she became fully conscious that it was Philip who was bending down to inquire how she was.

She looked very pretty and delicate as she lay back on the pillows and closed her eyes again.

She thought swiftly and strongly in that moment; she was quick to see that fate had been kind to her.

Philip's concern and sympathy was legibly written on his face. There had been no time for questions, and Kit could have said nothing.

She must act swiftly, immediately; she must take Philip into her confidence, and invent some story to explain things.

"You are better," Sir Philip said as she opened her eyes again. "I am so glad; you looked very ill, and your cousin was so much alarmed."

Constance looked round.

"Where is Kit?" she inquired, her voice feeble and low. "I—"

Sir Philip explained that the girl had run upstairs to see Lady Milborough, who had heard something had happened, and was a little anxious and nervous, especially as she was not well enough to come down from her room.

"Oh! I am so sorry," Constance murmured; I hope I have not made her ill. I don't often faint, I am usually so strong in my nerves, but to-day—" and then she paused effectively, and half raised herself. "Sir Philip," she said hurriedly, a tiny colour creeping into her pale cheeks, "I—I want to say a few words to you before Kit comes. I promised her I would keep silence about everything, but—but I feel I must explain myself to you, or I am afraid to think what your opinion of me will be. I—"

"Dear Miss Marlowe," Philip said, simply and earnestly, and speaking the truth, "I assure you I am not in the least curious or anxious to know any secret. It has something to do with your little cousin being here with Lady Milborough, has it not? Well, please do not worry yourself. I am sure no explanation is necessary."

"Oh! but there is!" Constance held out her hand. "If you would help me to that chair outside, I should feel better. You are so kind, Sir Philip," she added as his strong hands almost lifted her through the window. "Now, please, listen. I have only a few words to say only in self justification; they must be said, for I—I cannot allow myself to seem, even for an instant, a person who prevaricates, or—" She smiled as he interrupted her courteously, and then went on abruptly. "You thought that child-in a school in Paris. So did I. Kit is an almost impossible nature—wild, unrestrained, but good to the core. Life with my mother was always trying to her; time after time she has threatened to run away, and be independent of everybody. She loves me, I believe, in her own strange fashion, and yet, you see, she has given me the greatest anxiety and sorrow, almost causing me a serious illness," here Constance rose, and taking his arm, moved slowly down the lawn, getting well out of earshot in case of Kit's return.

She spun out her false story glibly—words came to her easily. She related how she had arranged for Kit to go to Paris to school, travelling up to town to put into the safe hands of the mistress of the school, under the care of an old and faithful servant. How that, on arriving in London, they found the French governess was not there, and Kit had immediately declared her capability of making her way to Paris alone. How from that moment the wild scheme of cutting herself adrift from her relations seemed to have entered the girl's head, and how by a series of

the most clever devices she had presented herself at Lady Grace Leith's house, passing herself off as a country girl whom she, Constance, had once recommended to Lady Grace as a maid, and so obtaining the situation.

"The rest I think you know," Constance said, sighing as she reached the end of her story. "How Sybil Leith, of course, saw that Kit was no ordinary servant, and how she obtained her this engagement with Lady Milborough."

Sir Philip had listened in grave silence.

"It seems a daring bit of madness for the little creature to have undertaken," he said, as she paused, and by the tone of his voice Constance knew he was not as yet convinced by her clever story. She answered him swiftly.

"You don't know Kit. She is capable of anything. The child has always been a source of great anxiety to me. I have never quite agreed with my mother over her education. Had I been allowed my way Kit should have had a very different childhood."

It was impossible not to be touched by the sound of regret and tenderness in Constance's voice. It was absolutely genuine.

"I know," she went on, "it sounds an almost impossible story, yet it has been possible, and you can imagine my horrible anxiety. Sir Philip, when this morning I received from Paris, in answer to a letter I wrote to the head of the pension, and making inquiries as to her progress, a communication informing me my cousin had never made her appearance there at all! How she managed to send me the two letters I have received I have not yet been able to elicit from her, but I imagine her chum, Chris Hornton, has been a conspirator with her, and must have helped her in this. I can account for it in no other way!"

Constance sank into a garden seat some little distance from the house, and sat looking up into the man's interested face. Her hair was little dishevelled, and her dress crumpled, but she had never looked prettier, and her slight assumption of maternal anxiety over Kit sat very well upon her.

Philip Desmond could not fail to be impressed by this air, though at the same time he was conscious of a distinct disappointment.

There was an unmistakable atmosphere of deceit and intrigue in this account of Kit's strange conduct which destroyed the pleasure her beautiful young personality had given him, and swept away much of the illusion that had arisen unconsciously about her. It was this thought that made him break in now with a question, put a little abruptly.

"But," he said, quickly, "I don't quite understand the girl's motive. Was she not happy?"

Constance smiled sadly, and bent her head.

"My mother is very strict; she has not much sympathy with young people," she answered, in a gentle way that excused Kit while it did not condemn her mother.

Sir Philip, remembering all Lady Sinclair had said about Mrs. Marlowe, at once gave Kit the full benefit of that excuse.

"It is a little romance in its way," he said, "fortunately it has ended well for Miss Kit. But how did you trace her here?"

"Through Sybil Leith." Constance was delighted beyond measure at the easy way in which she had overcome what had appeared an insuperable difficulty, "her description of her protégée, all the pretty things she said of Kit. I don't know what exactly led me to jump to the conclusion that my truant was here, but I did so jump, and on the strength of that conviction I rushed off from town, having got the address from Sybil, and my fears and anxiety were well repaid, you see!"

Constance passed her hand over her brow, she was feeling weak and faint again, the reaction was setting in after so much intense mental excitement. She was very pale, and Sir Philip insisted on leading her slowly back to the house.

"You are not strong I fear. I hope you will allow yourself to be persuaded to remain here until to-morrow. I am sure you ought to do so."

But Constance shook her head.

"Oh! my friends would be so alarmed, and now that I know the child is safe," and then she turned to him. "I have given her my word I will tell no one anything of her escapade. She is to remain Miss Lowe, the name she has adopted, and is to pursue her career of independence unmolested. She is afraid if Lady Milborough knew. You will say nothing to her, Sir Philip. I know I may trust you not to mention either to Kit or to anyone."

"You may trust me," he said, gravely. "My lips are sealed," he put her gently into the chair she had occupied before.

"You are so kind," Constance murmured, resting her head against the cushions.

Sir Philip looked at her a moment.

"If you insist on returning to town to-night, Miss Marlowe, I must be equally determined, and return with you, to see that you arrive in safety. Oh! yes, indeed I must, I cannot let you travel alone. I will just have five minutes chat with my cousin. I ran down to day because I heard she was not very well, and I am very much attached to her. I suppose I must have missed you at Paddington, and I got out at the station before —," naming the one at which Constance had alighted, "as I wanted to have a rough survey of some of the land, otherwise we should have arrived together. Here comes your servant. I will leave you together. Poor child! she looks dreadfully worried about you."

He stood on one side to let Kit come through the window. Somehow all his disapproval melted away as he saw her.

There was a dignity and subdued air about her that had little kinship with the tale of wild recklessness which he had just heard; yet he did not doubt the story. It would, indeed, have been hard to doubt anything Constance said.

He went upstairs, nevertheless, with his brows knit, and had a little chat with Lady Milborough; she was not unnaturally curious and interested in the lady who had called to see Kate, and who had suffered such a severe fainting fit.

"I think her visit has upset the child, though she says nothing. It is someone from her home, is it not, Philip? I hope it is not a summons to take her away from me!"

"You like her, then?" Sir Philip asked, feeling a large degree of pleasure in hearing his kinswomen speak in this way.

"She is adorable!" Lady Milborough said, quickly. "She has every quality I admire, and is full of human nature. I am only afraid she will be too quiet here, and she does not want more depression. She needs the enjoyment and excitement of life that are the fitting accompaniments of her age. She is altogether too subdued and thoughtful!"

Sir Philip was astonished at this. Was the girl an enigma—subdued and thoughtful, when she had just carried through in so bold and dashing a manner, a scheme for her own independence? He held his tongue, however; he had promised Constance to be silent and secret; he would keep his word. But his interest in the "little witch" was already despised three-fold, and he determined to follow her career carefully.

Lady Milborough's good word was a great credential; for she was a very shrewd woman, and one who rarely made any mistake in her judgment of people; but despite this and despite his honest admiration for her beauty and keen sympathy for the unhappiness of her former life which Constance had hinted at. Philip could not quite reconcile the thought of the deception Kit was supposed to have practised.

"Independence is a splendid thing; but it is not to be won by trick, and deceit!" he thought to himself, then as he recalled Constance's words about Chris Norton's share

in the conspiring the posting of false letters, and he felt a pain and a sense of stronger disapproval than before.

"She begins badly, poor child!" he thought, "well I can only hope she will be able to walk straight here. She is in good home now and has a good chance, it will be her own fault if she fails!"

When he returned downstairs he found Constance veiled and gloved ready for him.

Kit was standing a little apart. Sir Philip could not quite see her face; for she was in a shadow, but he went up to her and held out his hand.

"Good-bye for to-day!" he said in his frank pleasant voice. After all he would not judge her just yet, he would wait. "We shall meet often—you and I, and we must be good friends. I am always running down here to see Lady Milborough. You will take great care of her, I know!"

Kit said nothing, she only let her little hand rest in his. His voice was like music in her ears after those few curt words. Constance had spoken when they were alone, Kit, full of remorse for a wrong, poor child, she had never committed, would have stretched out her hands and made some acknowledgment; for she had been fond of Constance, and the heavy fainting fit had touched her tender womanly heart to its core, but Miss Marlowe drew back.

"Oh, please don't try to be hypocritical. You can't undo what you have done or unsay what you have said. You have behaved shamefully to me. Of course we shall have to meet now and then, I suppose, and despite your great independence you will no doubt find it useful to apply to me sometime or other; but I shall never forget that you refused to grant me the first favour I ever asked you. No, I shall not forget, and I shall not forgive either!" and then Constance had turned to a long mirror and had devoted her whole attention to arranging her toilet for her return journey.

Kit at these words had let her hand drop to her side and all her warmth freeze into her former cold quietness. She moved about the room rearranging it, and then she had stood still as Sir Philip came in.

The touch of his hand, the sound of his voice was suddenly beautiful to the poor unhappy young being who was tasting the first bitterness of life's cruelty and pain, and stood alone and defenceless in face of the struggle which to her saddened eyes stretched so wearily ahead of her. Philip Desmond struck a different note in the monotony of misery. She could scarcely have said why; but she felt all at once that in this man there would be neither deceit, treachery, or disappointment. He was not handsome as Maurice had been nor was his voice gentle as Constance's could be. He was to her a middle-aged man rather stern in expression with no great personal attributes to charm or fascinate the senses. Yet Kit's whole nature seemed to revive and respond to his mere touch, and a feeling of pleasure stole over her troubled mind as he spoke of friendship between them.

It must have been some strange prescience that made her understand even in this first moment of meeting what a treasure a friend like Philip Desmond could be to her or any living being.

(To be continued.)

The first rudimentary bicycle was mounted by Baron von Drais, a Frenchman, living in Germany, who early in this century invented a combination of two wheels, a seat, and handles, which he called "celerifere," to aid him in his work of overseeing large estates. The old cuts of this odd machine, called after the inventor, the "Draisine," show it to be in its general features the direct forerunner of the hobby horse. "Draisines" were introduced into England in 1818, and a year later were seen in America, on the streets of New York.

HER FATHER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER XXII.—(continued.)

The place had been well named Monrepos. The heart must have been heavy indeed that would not have grown lighter amid these peaceful sunny scenes. It had been the favourite home of the late Admiral Wilmer. The house had been designed by his young wife and built during his absence at sea. It was here his child had been born, and here that, after his retirement from his profession, he had delighted to sail up and down the river and imagine himself upon the sea he had loved so dearly. It was here that the happiest days of Adah Wilmer had been passed, and to this spot her heart turned instinctively in the first moment of her freedom.

It was early evening, and the house was all ablaze with lights. The front door stood invitingly open, revealing the long wide hall, with its niches filled with gleaming sculptured figures, its flaming chandelier lighting the most distant corners, the cool Mosaic floor with its intricate pattern, the walls ornamented with rich, soft frescoes, the work of a skilful hand, and the wide marble staircase winding gracefully upwards until lost to view.

Servants were grouped about in the hall, with eager faces and busy tongues, discussing the news that had been brought by some of the town servants, under charge of Mrs. Dilks, of their young mistress's perfect health and intended return to her childhood's home. The news had been received with loud rejoicing by the few superannuated retainers who had been for years in charge of the place, and, under the town housekeeper's directions, the house had been made to assume a festal air in honour of the home-coming. Mrs. Dilks herself, important and pompous, in a rustling black silk gown, assumed command of the group, and constituted herself mistress of the ceremonies.

The drawing-room door stood partly ajar, enough to admit a peep into its charming interior. The glittering candelabra presented a blazing show of tall wax candles, whose light gleamed through the pendant cut-glass lustres and fell in shower of prismatic hues upon the silver-inlaid Indian table beneath. The carpet looked like a fresh bed of woodland moss, sprinkled with exquisite flowers, linked together with strange arabesques. The furniture was luxurious—soft couches, yielding arm-chairs, cosy ottomans, and fauteuils, that might have been called "sleep-hollows," the whole reflected in plate-glass mirrors that ran from floor to ceiling. The acme of luxury was attained by the liberal distribution of freshly cut flowers, whose fragrance pervaded the air. Delicately sculptured vases of the purest white were heaped high with vivid scarlet blossoms whose bright branches trailed over the sides; antique jugs of veritable Egyptian origin were crowded with odorous flowers; the two quaintly shaped scent-jars, on either side of the bright fire, that glowed and sparkled cheerfully in the fire-place, dispensed a spicy sweetness that mingled with the odour of the flowers and gave an invigorating perfume to the air that might otherwise have been heavy with fragrance.

Behind the drawing-room, and seen through the partly open folding-doors, was the luxurious dining-room. The glitter of costly plate and the sparkle of gem-like crystal, in the lamp-light and fire-light, could be seen, thus completing the charm of the scene.

This department had been under the charge of Watkins, the town butler, who had followed the domestics, with the more valuable plate in his keeping, and now joined his subordinates in the corridor, and assumed a commanding air, befitting one who felt himself in a measure the guardian and protector of his young mistress.

The servants were in the midst of eager gossiping, which even Watkins's presence failed to check, relative to the mysterious marriage of the late Admiral's daughter, and the singular conduct of the uncle, when the rumbling of wheels up the carriage-drive was heard. Voices were instantly hushed, and stillness reigned, while every face turned towards the door.

The ex-steward, as became his confidential position in the household, advanced to the verandah, followed by the housekeeper, and welcomed his young mistress with a joyful fervency that warmed her heart. She paused a moment to speak to him, then entered the hall, attended by her maid, and looking so like a queen, in the hour of her triumph, that an involuntary cheer of admiration greeted her.

She acknowledged the compliment by a bow and smile; her eyes sparkled and her cheek flushed with sudden pleasure. She had expected to come to a quiet home and to be received quietly, and this enthusiastic reception at once surprised and touched her. She gave her hand to the housekeeper, uttering a few words of praise that greatly endeared her to the worthy woman's heart; she spoke gently to each of the servants, and addressed by name each of the retainers who had been left in charge of the place since the death of her late father. Her gentleness and graciousness deepened their admiration into respectful devotion, and, when she turned and entered the drawing-room with a stately step, every eye followed her affectionately, and every voice again lent itself to swell a rousing cheer.

"Well, I am at home again, Nelly," said the young bride, advancing to the centre of the drawing-room, and looking around her with moistened eyes. "This is the house where I was born, and where I hope to spend the remainder of my life. This place has few associations connected with Mr. Wilmer, and I believe I can forget the past here, and lead a useful, happy existence."

"You speak like an old lady, miss," said the privileged Nelly, with a sigh, "and not like a beautiful young bride of one-and-twenty."

"Hush, Nelly. I do not like to think of my marriage," and a burning flush suffused the lady's cheeks. "Here I may forget by what sacrifice of maidenly delicacy I secured my freedom. You must be careful never to mention my husband's name."

"I will remember, my lady," promised the maid, in a tone of disappointment, she having been deeply impressed with the appearance of Sir Hugh Chellis, and having been engaged in creating pleasant day dreams in which the young couple would learn to love each other, and their marriage thus become a union hallowed by tenderness and mutual respect. "But what will people say when they hear that you are married, and yet are obliged to call you Miss Wilmer? The neighbours may even say that you are not married at all."

"The neighbours?"

"Yes, my lady. The Dares, of Edencourt, near the river, Lord Tressilian of the Hall, and others. Sir Allyn Dare may even forbid his daughter to call. These proud county families do not like family mysteries."

"They can stay away," said Lady Chellis, a look of pain passing over her proud face. "We will not discuss the subject, Nelly. I have retained Monrepes by a fearful sacrifice, and I am willing to lead hermit's existence here, if necessary. I will not deny that the friendship of Miss Dare would be very pleasant to me, but if I cannot have it I shall not mourn. I will confess that I do not expect attentions from my neighbours, and that I am quite content."

She endeavoured to speak lightly, but there was an undercurrent of pain in her tone that touched her faithful attendant to the heart. But, affecting not to notice it, she came forward, relieved her young mistress of her

hat and cloak, and wheeled near for her ladyship's use an arm chair.

The cloud upon Adah's brow was but transitory. The proud, calm look returned to her half-haughty face, the smile came back to her red lips, and the consciousness of rectitude gave a repose to her manner. Instead of seating herself and giving way to despondency, she summoned the housekeeper, and went with her over the dwelling. Every room was well lighted, and the fair young proprietress went in and out of the handsome chambers, indulging in reminiscences of the far-away happy past, and planning a quiet, well-ordered future. Her own of suite rooms was discovered to be the finest in the house, and a throng of tender recollections pressed the heart of the maiden-bride as she entered them and requested to be left alone.

They had been fitted up for her use by her parents shortly before the death of her mother. The portrait of the bluff old Admiral hung beside the picture of his fair and gentle wife, and the eyes of both seemed to rest upon their daughter in yearning love. Adah knelt before the portraits with bowed head and folded hands, murmuring a wild, incoherent prayer, with sobs and tears. She felt her desolation at that moment as she had never done before, and her soul sent up a wild cry for comfort. The prayer was answered. A strange sweet calm fell upon her perturbed spirit, and it seemed to her that angel presences were about her, and that her parents were whispering words of love and soothing in her ears.

This conviction was strengthened when she arose from her knees and looked around her. The delicate frescoes on the walls had been done under the superintendance of her father. The paintings on the walls had been brought from Italy by him for her; the tiny statuettes that abounded had been chosen by him; while the dainty furniture of rose colour and white had been selected by her mother. There were all the appliances of luxury, besides hosts of curiosities and trinkets, each having some association with those loved ones whose darling she had been. What wonder, then, that she cherished a sweet faith in guardian angels and ministering spirits, and believed that her guardian angels were those who had begun their tender ministrations in this life, and the evidences of whose love were now around her?

With a sweet and holy peace brooding at her heart, she went through the three or four rooms of the suite, finding everything as she had left it when taken away from Monrepes by her uncle after the death of her father. Gentle hands had kept everything bright and fresh, and it seemed to her that her imprisonment and sorrows were but idle phantasms now happily dispelled.

There was a happy light in her eyes when she returned to the drawing-room, and a smile on her lips that puzzled Nelly, who wondered that her young mistress did not repine at her compelled isolation. In pleasant abstraction, the young bride seated herself at the piano, and evoked a few sweet, murmuring sounds, full of harmony with the joyful pulsations of her heart. She lingered at the music until Watkins came to announce supper, and then she arose and went into the dining-room, at the end of the drawing room. Her cheerfulness had been infectious, for Nelly followed her with a pleased and contented face.

The repast was worthy the admiration of an epicure, and Lady Chellis complimented her delighted purveyor by bringing to it a better appetite than she had before displayed. Nelly, who was more of a companion than maid, was invited to share the meal, that it might seem less lonely to her mistress. In quiet enjoyment of a scene that appealed to the bride's aesthetic tastes, an hour passed quickly, and Lady Chellis then went into the drawing-room, and soon after retired to her own rooms for the night.

As she took possession of the chamber she had occupied in the lifetime of her parents she felt a thrill of exultation in the reflection that

she had saved this cherished spot from the grasp of her scheming relative, and that she was not only its rightful mistress, but the arbitress of her own destinies. This happy consciousness did not desert her in her sleep, and when she awoke at a late hour in the morning her heart was full of strange buoyancy and joyousness.

She attire herself becomingly, assisted by Nelly, and then descended to breakfast. The repast concluded, she summoned the ex-steward and the housekeeper to a brief consultation, and, her domestic affairs established on a sound basis, she soon after set out to walk over the estate, and to indulge in reminiscences of her childhood. Nelly attended her, as usual, but delicately maintained silence except when addressed.

The gardens were explored, the two gardeners consulted with regard to a few immaterial changes in their arrangements, and Lady Chellis then directed her steps to the green fields where the spring daises studded the ground. With something of childish delight she plucked a handful of the flowers, exulting in her freedom, in the bright sunshine, the soft breeze, and the tranquil beauty of the scene. After her long imprisonment she saw beauty in everything—in the young lambs, the upspringing grass, the hedges in early leaf, and in the gay wild birds that sang in sympathetic exultation.

She lingered long in the sunny open fields and meadows, but turned her steps at last, when the sun grew fiercer in his regards, to the cool and pleasant grove. Here the shadows lay thickly, but the venturesome sunlight strayed in and settled in tiny pools upon the narrow well-worn foot-paths, giving the place the aspect of a fairy dell. Violets, fragrant wood-violets of deepest blue, opened their eyes meekly here and dispensed their sweet odours lavishly. Adah gathered them and twined them in bunches with her daisies and listened to the birds, that flittered in and out of the shade, with a delicious sense of enjoyment she had never before known.

In the shade of a giant oak, near a small brook that intersected the grove and ran through the fields, was a wooden bench, and the young bride took possession of it, her maid choosing to wander about in search of other flowers. The cool shade, the fragrance of her wild blossoms, the filtering sunlight, the murmuring of the brook, the songs of the birds, and the happy beatings of her own heart, all conspired to fill the maiden into a dreamy mood, as delightful as it was unusual. Perhaps she thought of Sir Hugh, for a soft colour mantled in her cheeks, her eyes shone with a sweet, tender light, and she forgot to mark the flight of time.

At last she aroused herself with a heavy sigh, and looked around her. Nelly was sitting upon a stone at the foot of a tree at a little distance, her eyes closed drowsily, and her lap filled with flowers. Lady Chellis looked at her watch, and started on discovering that the afternoon had well deepened, and that the luncheon hour had passed unnoticed.

"Why, where has the time gone?" she exclaimed, arising. "Come, Nelly, come at once!"

The maid aroused herself and joined her mistress, and they returned to the dwelling together. After a hasty rearrangement of her toilet Lady Chellis ate her luncheon, and then ascended to her room to dress for dinner. Even during her enforced seclusion she had never omitted to make an elaborate daily toilet, but upon this occasion, as if to celebrate her restoration to freedom, her attire was unusually becoming.

She returned to the drawing-room, dressed in a robe of mauve moiré which trailed after in a long, flowing train. Her snowy shoulders were covered only by a berthe of filmy white lace which set off their beauty instead of concealing it, and her rounded white arms were bare and gleamed like delicately chiselled marble. Her dusky hair was caught up low

at the back of her head in a classic knot, and confined there by a feathery spray of diamonds. She wore a necklace and bracelets—the identical gems that had been pledged to Sir Hugh as a guarantee for the payment of the promised sum. Beautiful as a Greek statue in the contour of her features, but gifted with a bloom and radiance that statue and painting can never attain, sparkling with a multitude of gems that flashed in the light of the myriad candles, she looked more than ever like a young queen—and no longer like a queen uncrowned.

The projecting window was filled with flowers, and the evening breeze swept over them, rifting them of their fragrance, and then wantonly flinging it upon the air. The lace curtains fluttered gently, but the lights in the candelabra burned steadily. Dismissing her maid, Lady Chellis took to her seat at the piano, and accompanied her thoughts with a strange, liquid melody, now soft and sweet, now sad, then again wild and full of anguish. So absorbed was she that she failed to hear the sound of an arrival, and was consequently startled beyond expression when the drawing-room door opened, and Baker, the footman, announced,—

"Miss Chellis!"

At the sound of that name Adah sprang up like a frightened fawn; her first thought was of retreat. But retreat was impossible, and she stood like a statue under the chandelier, the colour fluttering in and out of her cheeks, and the light waxing and waning in her glorious eyes.

Miss Chellis entered almost before her name had been fully enunciated, and found her standing thus. The little old lady, in her antiquated costume, paused, and regarded the maiden with surprise and admiration.

"I have the pleasure of meeting Miss Wilmer—Adah Wilmer, have I not?" questioned Sir Hugh's aunt, her keen black eyes scrutinising the young bride's lovely face.

Adah strove to recover her self-possession, but her embarrassment was too painful to be readily overcome. Her mind was confused, and but one thought developed itself from the chaos, that thought was that she had carefully preserved her identity from Sir Hugh, and consequently Miss Chellis could not be aware of her singular marriage.

"I am Adah Wilmer," she said, with an effort to speak calmly, and stepping towards her guest. "And you," she added, scarcely knowing what she said, yet conscious that she ought to say something—"you are Miss Chellis, my father's old friend, and almost my relative!"

"Am I not quite?" inquired Miss Chellis, kindly. "Are you not Lady Chellis—Sir Hugh's bride?"

Adah looked up with a wild and startled gaze. Then soft blushes gave way to a scarlet tide that surged in and out of her cheeks; she dropped her gaze, and stood a perfect picture of maidenly shame and confusion, not daring to look up, and not having strength to move.

The little old spinster was moved by her confusion. She hobbled forward with her cane, her boot-heels clicking faintly as they sank into the carpet, and her elated face full of sympathy. She took the cold, unresisting hand of her grand-nephew's bride, and led her to a couch, saying, in her peremptory tones—

"This won't do at all, my dear. We can't have this, you know. You have nothing to be ashamed of—nothing at all. You are a girl of spirit, after my own heart. Come, look up and kiss your great-aunt, though I know I don't deserve it after leaving you to the mercy of that wretch of an uncle of yours all these years."

This style of address had the effect. Adah struggled for composure, and ventured to lift her gaze, but Miss Chellis was not content until the maiden's lips had caressed her withered cheeks, and until she had kissed her in return.

"There now," she said, in tones of satisfaction, "we have placed ourselves upon the proper footing immediately. Dear me, how could that scheming fellow have ever pretended you were insane? You are not insane, are you, my dear? But it will be as well if I settle the point for myself. I'm as good a med-doctor, I fancy, as the one Mr. Wilmer employed," she added dryly.

She looked keenly into the troubled face beside her, putting her hand under Adah's chin, that she might contemplate her countenance more at her ease. Her bright black eyes seemed to penetrate the maiden's very soul. She studied the lovely, quivering mouth, the fair, smooth brow, but more than all the beautiful eyes that at first hesitated to meet her gaze and then lifted themselves resolutely and sorrowfully.

"About as insane as I am," was Miss Chellis's comment, when she had concluded her investigation. "I should never have got over it, Adah Wilmer, that is, Chellis, if that wretch had kept you shut up until he had secured your property. What a wild sort of will that was of your father's to be sure. I never heard of anything more crack-brained in my life. Thank Providence that you outwitted your guardian at last. I should have liked to have seen him when you announced your marriage."

Again the young bride dropped her head in confusion.

"Now Adah," said the little lady, decidedly, "it won't do to be ashamed of what you have done. In trying to keep your father's property she has acted like a noble, spirited girl. Anybody with the brains of a mouse would say the same. If my hearty approval will do you any good, you have it. I understand all about the trial to your delicacy, and all that, but I must say that I respect you a great deal more than if you had folded your hands and let that old sinner take your fortune."

"How did you find me out?" faltered the bride, her voice tremulous and her manner downcast.

"By the merest accident in the world," responded the old lady, taking Adah's hand in her own. "That scamp, Hugh, never told me a word, and would not have done so but for Mr. James Wilmer."

"Mr. Wilmer?"

"Yes. Let me tell you how it all occurred. I was sitting peacefully in the drawing-room at Hawk's Nest this morning, thinking to myself whether I'd better leave my money to found an African mission or leave it to Hugh, when who should come in but Mr. James Wilmer. He wanted to see my grand-nephew. While he waited I entered into conversation with him, and he told me you were insane. I doubted him, for he acted and looked like a villain—didn't meet my eyes once. I told him what I thought of him, and then Hugh summoned him to the library. I followed, thinking to expose his real character to my nephew. I got there in time to hear a very pretty conversation, not meant for my ears."

She paused, and laughed softly to herself, thumping her staff into the carpet, and resumed,—

"It seems that Mr. James Wilmer had the idea that Hugh was married to his niece, and Hugh supposed Mr. Wilmer had come to visit me. They talked at cross-purposes a while, and then it came out that that stupid nephew of mine had married a girl named Adah Holte, without once suspecting her to be Adah Holte Wilmer. Men, my dear, are fearfully stupid creatures. I should have suspected the truth in a minute, had I been Hugh. So I stepped out and confronted the two, and told Hugh who his wife was, and Mr. James Wilmer left Hawk's Nest in a hurry, and Hugh and I set out at once to offer you our protection."

Adah's face was very pale as she said,—

"My dear Miss Chellis—"

"Aunt Dorothy!" interrupted the little lady, peremptorily. "I am not going to be

cheated out of my rights, Adah. I am your great-aunt, my dear."

"Aunt Dorothy," replied Adah, "what does Sir Hugh think of me?"

"Think of you?—why, just what he should think! On the way here he told me how the marriage had been brought about. And he did say he was about starting in search of you when that viper came to us. He had a clue, because your tickets were to West Hoxton. You are not quite sharp enough, my dear, to outwit those who love you, even if you outwit your enemies. Hugh is a romantic young fellow, though strangely enough he never cared for women. He admires spirit too, and he hasn't been able to think of anyone but you since his first meeting with you. He said today that he thought more highly of himself now, since he had been of assistance to you. He is as chivalrous, my dear, as any knight of olden time; and his only grief is that he accepted any money from you. And that reminds me, Adah, that if either has cause to be ashamed it is he, not you. He feels it so, and says if he had not taken the money in the manner he did he should not be ashamed to meet you!"

This view of the case encouraged the young bride. A faint smile flickered about her mouth, and a more hopeful expression took possession of her face.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"At the village inn. He wanted to come with me, but was not certain of his reception. I promised to do what I could for him. He is a young scamp, Adah, and not worthy of you by any means; but he is your husband, and you ought to live together!"

"Never!" exclaimed the bride, energetically. "You cannot think so, Miss Chellis. Did your nephew not tell you of our compact never to see each other again?"

"Certainly, and that compact was well enough then. I intend to stay here until you do receive Hugh, for you have need of protection from that relative of yours."

With these words, Miss Chellis quietly untied her great, old-fashioned bonnet and threw aside her pelisse revealing her quaint brocade, with its decorating ruffs.

"I shall be glad for you to stay, Aunt Dorothy," said Lady Chellis—"but not Sir Hugh!"

"Humph! You'll see him, of course, when he calls in the morning!"

Adah responded in the negative.

"But what will your servants and neighbours think, if you refuse to see your husband?"

"My servants know that I am married, but they do not know to whom. They call me Miss Wilmer. As to the neighbours, I shall see none of them!"

"Dear, deary me!" exclaimed Miss Chellis. "Going to turn hermit at your age, eh? It can't be done, Adah," she added, firmly. "Not a bit of it. To act as you desire will be to ruin your name—the name your father covered with honour. You must come out boldly. Tell your servants and everybody that you are Lady Chellis. If you don't you may be sure that you'll be set down as a lunatic, and Mr. James Wilmer will have control of you again."

"Would Sir Hugh be willing for me to bear his name?"

"Of course. He would feel honoured. You must be recognised as Lady Chellis at once, and I shall remain with you until you receive Hugh as your husband."

"Then you will always remain, Aunt Dorothy!"

"What headstrong things young people are!" ejaculated Miss Dorothy; adding, curtly. "No, I shan't remain always, Adah Chellis. You will have pity upon that poor anxious boy, who has fallen in love with your pretty face. You can't have the heart to turn him off like a servant of whom you are tired—"

"But you, who knew him so well, Aunt Dorothy," said Adah, rather archly, "are in doubt whether to leave your fortune to him or

to the heathen. I am a perfect stranger to him, and if you consider him——”

“Nonsense!” interrupted Miss Dorothy, her cheeks reddening deeply. “I was only trying the lad. I didn’t really intend to cut off the only relative I had in the world and leave my money for a parcel of heathen to buy civilised gridirons to roast each other on. I had some thought, but let that pass. I’ve given up my heathenish idea—for it wasn’t much better—and intend to divide what I’ve got between you and Hugh if you live apart, or else give all to him. Indeed if you refuse to accept him as a ‘husband,’ she added, struck with a happy idea, “I will leave it all to you and impoverish him.”

Adah combated this resolution, declaring that she had enough, but Miss Chellis persisted in her declaration, saying that in that way she could repay the sum given Sir Hugh on account of the marriage. Lady Chellis protested against even these threatenings, and the old lady was forced to “possess her soul in patience.” The fly in which she had come was dismissed without a message to the young Baronet, and Adah conducted her to a suite of rooms upon the ground-floor and aided her to prepare for dinner.

They returned to the drawing-room as Watkins announced dinner.

“Please give me your arm, my dear Lady Chellis,” said the old lady, in a loud, distinct voice, meant for the ears of the ex-steward.

Watkins understood that the marriage was to be kept secret no longer, and a look of pride passed over his weather-beaten face as Adah gave her arm to the old lady and conducted her to the dinner-room. He seemed to feel a personal exaltation in the aggrandizement of his young mistress, and addressed her as “my lady” continually, as if the title were sweet in his ears.

Before an hour had passed the entire establishment were talking of “my lady,” and “her ladyship’s great-aunt,” and were discussing the history of Sir Hugh Chellis, of whom an idea prevailed that he was a princely, generous young gentleman, who had thrown away fortunes, but who was now going to become as sober and staid as his young wife could desire. Nelly Thomas, of course, took her share in the gossiping, but she was careful not to betray the secret of the marriage. Indeed, she caused it to be received as a fact that the marriage was the result of the well-known friendship between the families of Chellis and Wilmer. She expatiated largely upon the personal attractions of the young Baronet, and hinted her belief that the young couple would eventually be brought together.

Meanwhile, Miss Dorothy and Adah dined, and then returned to the drawing room, where the bright-eyed old lady again assailed her, begging her at least to see Sir Hugh.

“I cannot, dear Dorothy,” said the young bride, earnestly. “Do not ask me again, I beg of you. I could not look him in the face. I know what he must think of me in his heart. I will not see him.”

From this resolve she could not then be swerved. But instead of being discouraged, the little old spinster, who seemed to Adah like a withered fairy, smiled quietly, and her black eyes sparkled with delight at some project of her own. What that project was was not revealed to her young hostess, but some light might have been thrown on it by the fact that she sought her room at an early hour and wrote a note to her grand-nephew, which she despatched with the utmost secrecy by a willing servant. That done, she laughed, and retired to bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

You stood before me like a thought,
A dream remembered in a dream.

Coleridge.

Upon the morning subsequent to the arrival of Miss Chellis at Monrepos, Adah devoted

herself to her guest, narrating to her the history of her ex-guardian’s persecutions, and detailing the many circumstances that led to her singular marriage. With downcast eyes and the burning flush of maidenly shame upon her clear cheeks, she told the whole story of her first encounter with Sir Hugh, of her proposition to him, and of the manner in which she had discharged her pecuniary obligations to him. She spoke as frankly as she would have done to her mother, had her mother lived, seeming to derive comfort from womanly sympathy, and the little old lady listened to her with kindling face and sparkling eyes, frequently interrupting her with praises for her spirit and courage, or with energetic and caustic remarks against Mr. Wilmer.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the keen-eyed spinster was charmed with her grand-nephew’s bride. Lady Chellis’s superb and stately beauty, her modesty and sensibility, her tender respect for her antiquated guest, her merciful treatment of her baffled guardian, even her decided refusal ever to see the husband she had so strangely won, all conspired to invest her with a romantic halo in the mind of Miss Chellis, whose heart was drawn towards her at once in love and admiration.

“To think I should have been such a mole all these years,” ejaculated the elfin-faced spinster, in tones expressive of disgust at her own blindness. “I’ve known everything that has transpired within twenty miles of Hawk’s Nest, even to the number of gowns the rector’s wife had in a year, and I’ve bothered my brains about Paris fashions with which to civilise the heathen, and all this time you were shut up by that sinner with no one to look after you. Dear, dear, I wonder I never thought or guessed the truth. Thank heaven, it was Hugh you encountered on that night. I shudder to think whose hands you might have fallen into. If you had not been protected by a merciful Providence, Adah, you would have been to-day the most unhappy woman in the world.”

Adah smiled brightly in the withered face of the little old lady, and pressed her tiny wrinkled hand upon one finger of which sparkled the diamond ring that had been the token of Miss Dorothy’s betrothal more than half a century before.

Her liquid black eyes had in them a look that the spinster had known and loved in other eyes long ago, and Miss Dorothy, with a sudden and strange tenderness, bent forward, impressed a kiss and let fall a tear upon the fair forehead.

“He looked as you do now,” she murmured. “You might have been his daughter instead of grand-niece. Henceforth, Adah, you shall be as a daughter to me for his sake, as well as your own.”

She sighed softly, still gazing upon the bright, sweet face of Sir Hugh’s young bride, her memory recalling lineaments very like those she looked upon, yet indicative of manly spirit and manly strength. Then the keenness of her eyes was dimmed by sudden tears, and she bowed her head upon the golden top of her cane.

Lady Chellis arose softly and stole from the room, leaving the old spinster lost in a deep and mournful reverie, in which she lived over again her vanished youth, and her heart thrilled to the remembered music of her dead lover’s voice.

Adah passed into the corridor, and encountered Watkins, the ex-steward of the late admiral, almost at the very door of the drawing-room. He carried in his hands a salver upon which repose a letter, which he hastened to present to his young mistress.

Lady Chellis received the missive, perceived by the address that it was from Captain Heddel, and engaged at once in its perusal.

Its contents were brief, for the old sailor’s forte was not in handling the pen, and to the effect that Mr. Wilmer and Mrs. Barratt had

quitted the town house the day before, and gone he knew not whither. The house was closed, and the keys in his possession. The servants, as her ladyship was aware, had been sent to her country home. He concluded with tendering his services whenever they should be required, and added that he should hold himself in readiness to answer her summons at a moment’s notice.

Putting the letter in her pocket, Adah returned to the drawing-room, where she found Miss Chellis apparently asleep in her armchair. Fearful of disturbing her, she stole out again, donned her hat, and set out for the grove. The morning was almost sultry, the sun shining intensely, and the air perfectly tranquil. The grove, with its cool, deep shadows, its murmuring brooks, its filtering sunlight, its fragrant flowers, and its myriad birds, was a calm and perfect Eden. Adah sought a seat in the deepest shade, and gave herself up to earnest thought.

Despite her wishes, the fair handsome face of Sir Hugh obtruded itself upon her mind, and she could not avoid recalling Miss Dorothy’s earnest praises of the young Baronet. The little old lady had told her that Sir Hugh was deeply interested in his mysterious bride, and she could not help acknowledging to herself that she was deeply interested in him.

“If we had but met as others do!” she murmured, almost unconsciously. “If the proposal had but come from him. As it is, I will never see him again—never!”

She sighed, and looked sad, as if the resolution gave a pang to her soul. While she was thus absorbed in these reflections, and annoyed at herself for her secret yearning towards her husband, who in her heart she dared not call by that tender and holy name, the bushes behind her were parted by a man’s hand, and an evil-looking face peered out at her from the protecting shade of the foliage.

It was the face of Mr. Wilmer.

No subtle instinct warned the maiden-bride of the near presence of danger. She thought and dreamt on, unconscious that a pair of baleful eyes were watching her intently or that her bitterest enemy was at hand, revolting in his base schemes by which he hoped to rebuild his ruined fortunes.

As is known to the reader, when Mr. Wilmer quitted Hawk’s Nest, after his discomfiture at the hands of Miss Chellis, it was with the determination to abandon his quiet schemes and become a bold, unscrupulous villain.

He had communicated his resolve to the ex-governess, who had not only encouraged him, but had proved herself an able confederate, suggesting plans of action, and even arranging the petty details with an aptitude that awakened the admiration of her employer.

It was in accordance with these new schemes that he had come secretly to Monrepos. He was skilfully disguised with false hair and colouring, and had been unrecognised at the West Hoxton Station, where he arrived soon after daybreak.

He had stopped at the village inn for a few hours, and then, feeling secure in his disguise, had walked towards Monrepos, in the hope of hearing something regarding Lady Chellis that would assist his present plans, as well as to ascertain the popular sentiment towards himself. Fasined with his walk, and seeing no one whom he could question, he had sought the pleasant shade of the grove he had so recently hoped to call his own, and had thrown himself upon the grass to rest. Adah’s appearance had aroused him and he had cautiously arisen, and was now surveying her with an angry, desperate gaze.

She looked so fair and tranquil as she sat there, with a tinge of melancholy in the expression of her face, with her long lashes resting against her cheeks and veiling her dusky eyes, her attitude full of repose and indicative of self-content. He could have gnashed his teeth as he gazed upon her and felt that he had fallen into the pit he had dug

for her, and that the very day upon which he had hoped to impoverish her and enrich himself had seen him penniless and witnessed her establishment in her rights.

His heart seethed with evil passions. He hated her as the author of his ruin, and his lips framed themselves into a muttered and insidious imprecation upon her. He glanced around—saw that she was alone and unattended—and with a sudden impulse tore off his disguise, thrust it into his pocket passed his handkerchief over his face, and leaped forth from his concealment.

Adah uttered a faint cry at his sudden and abrupt intrusion upon her privacy, then, recovering herself, she arose with haughtiness, and endeavoured to pass by him on her return to the dwelling.

But he put out his hand and detained her.

"Stop, Adah," he said, hoarsely. "I must speak with you—"

"Any communications which you may wish to make to me, Mr. Wilmer," she answered, coldly, and with the air of an empress, "must come to me through my adored friend and friend, Captain Heddell!"

She again essayed to pass him, but he stepped in the path before her, and exclaimed,—

"I will tell you and you alone what I have to say, Adah. Listen to me. I have been to Hawk's Nest, and have gained a clue to the mystery of your marriage. I have learned that Sir Hugh Chellis did not even know your rightful name upon the occasion of your marriage. If such a story were told to society at large, you would be compelled to lead a hermit's existence. I will keep your secret, if you will pay me liberally. If you do not, I will spread a report that will reach even to this quiet place, and make a social outcast of you!"

Lady Chellis listened with curling lip and flashing eyes to his unmanly threatening, but when he had finished she turned upon him a face white and cold as marble in its superb scornfulness and passionate contempt.

"The last step of your degradation is reached," she said, in a tone full of withering scorn. "You threaten to disgrace the name my father bore if I do not bribe you. Do your worst," and her voice rang out through the grove with the silvery cadence of a bell. "Say what you will—but go!"

She raised her arm, and pointed in the direction he had come.

Angry and desperate, Mr. Wilmer would not obey her command. He had had no intention of bringing about the present scene when he had entered the grove. His nefarious schemes for rebuilding his fortunes had nothing to do with any personal application to his wronged niece. Indeed he had resolved to keep his presence near her home a secret from her, but in an unguarded moment he had betrayed himself, and he would not now relinquish the opportunity he had gained until he had thoroughly used it.

"I will not go, Adah," he said, obstinately, "until you have secured my silence—"

"Then you will remain her earwax," she responded, coldly. "Tell your story. Do you think that I have no friends who will declare the truth and expose your infamy? Let the world decide between us. I do not fear its judgment!"

With a calm and haughty air she turned, and would have glided away, but he caught her arm in a vice-like grasp that was intensely painful, and hissed, rather than said,—

"You dare me, then, to do my worst? You must have a small amount of womanly modesty, Adah Wilmer, if you are willing to hear the very children in the streets tell how you proposed marriage to a perfect stranger, how you bribed him to become your husband and paid him for his name as you would have paid your milliner. Why, there will be songs made about it—jokes uttered—and people will sneer whenever your name is heard. It shall be so, for I will bring about that result. You are a wife, yet not a wife. You have a hus-

band whom you dare not claim, a husband—"

"Who is Lady Chellis's protector and defender!" cried a manly, indignant voice, finishing the sentence.

A sharp blow upon Mr. Wilmer's arm caused him to relax his grasp upon that of Lady Chellis with a cry of pain. He had scarcely freed her, when a sudden and dexterous movement of the new comer's foot precipitated him, head foremost, into the clump of bushes from which he had lately emerged, and the new comer's voice remarked, very pleasantly and very quietly,—

"Next time, Mr. Wilmer, I shall be obliged to resort to more unpleasant measures. If you venture in these grounds again I will have you arrested!"

Bruised and foaming with rage, Mr. Wilmer arose and slunk away through the shade of the trees, vowing revenge for the indignity he had endured.

Then, with an easy, graceful bow, Sir Hugh Chellis—for, as the reader has guessed, Lady Chellis's defender was her husband—turned towards his bride.

She had recognised him at once, and had been tempted to flee, but had delayed it until escape was impossible. She stood before him in all her beauty, heightened by the loveliness of her confusion. The colour fluctuated in her cheeks, like the tide which comes and goes upon the white sands of the sea-shore. Her crimson lips quivered like those of a grieved child; her dusky eyes, half lifted in unconscious depreciation, were full of maidenly shame and embarrassment. Her attitude was drooping, and her hands were clasped together. Had art and not nature dictated her position, she could not have made herself lovelier, or appealed more powerfully to the quick and generous love of Sir Hugh.

His easy gracefulness vanished as he witnessed her embarrassment and remembered the sum of money she had given him. He wished, most fervently, that he could appear before her as a disinterested suitor, and not as the husband she had bought with her wealth.

"Lady Chellis," he said, deprecatingly, "I have to beg your pardon for not keeping my promise never to seek you. When I learned through the visit of yonder villain the name of my unknown bride, and discovered the need you had of protection, not only from him but from the world at large, I determined to come to you at once and offer you my services as your defender. I hope my aunt has induced you to look kindly upon me, for she wrote to me last evening saying that I might call to day."

"Humph! The young idiot!" ejaculated Miss Dorothy, who, at a little distance, was contemplating the young couple with a benevolent look, ready to make her presence known at the precise moment when her mediation should be required. "That isn't the way to begin." And she leaned heavily upon her gold-headed staff, and peered keenly out at them.

Adah did not reply to Sir Hugh's address. Her bosom rose and fell with quick throbs, her eyes drooped, and the scarlet and white played hide and seek more rapidly than ever in her cheeks.

"Adah," said Sir Hugh, coming nearer to her, and speaking with all the earnestness of his nature, "take back the gold with which you bribed me to our marriage. Take it back, and leave me free to woo you. I love you, Adah, brief as has been our acquaintance. My heart bleeds at the wrongs you have endured. Let me protect you and defend you, not as your mercenary bridegroom, but as your husband who loves you better than his life. Tell me, Adah, that you will accept me as a lover and a suitor."

He spoke with a breathless, painful eagerness, that forced its way to the heart of his young bride. Perhaps there was a kindred emotion there, for as he continued to plead

for her favour, with passionate love expressed in every tone, the rose-tint settled on her cheeks, a soft, sweet light flattered up in her eyes, and a faint and tender smile curved her mouth. His embarrassment gave her strength, courage, and self-possession. She looked up timidly into his fair and handsome face, surrounded by his profusion of light waving hair, and thought in her heart how noble and grand he looked. And then she held out her hand shyly,—

"There's no good in my staying here any longer," muttered the withered old fairy, her face beaming with delight. "Hugh must work his own way now. I've done what I could. I'll go back to the house before I get a dreadful rheumatism." And she hobbled back to the dwelling, her boot-heels and her staff ringing out a quaint sound on the gravel as she went.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Misfortune does not always wait on vice. Nor is success the constant guest of virtue.

Howard.

The evening shadows had fallen around Edencourt. The night was pleasant with starlight and the soft breath of flowers. There was a tranquil bush around the dwelling and about the grounds—a bush that encouraged the soul of Ilde Dare as she looked from her open window with questioning eyes. It was the night upon which she had planned to visit Oakshaw, in quest of the mysterious paper upon which her father's life in part depended. As she stood in that soft dim light, her sweet face wore a resolute look, her lips a determined expression, and her eyes shone with a calm and steady radiance not unlike the glorious starlight, and indicative of the resoluteness and tranquillity reigning in her soul.

"The time has come," she murmured, softly, as if fearing that even the breeze might catch her words and betray her to her enemy. "It is not yet midnight, but I see no lights about the house," and she leaned from the projecting window, and looked up and down the darkened front of the mansion. "Therwell has retired, and is probably asleep. I will get ready at once."

She drew back, closed the curtains securely and then lighted her table-lamp. Her riding-habit lay conveniently near upon a couch, and she donned it at once, tossing aside her evening-dress, her movements full of swiftness and gentleness. With nimble fingers she drew on her close-fitting jacket and tied about her neck a soft Indian scarf as a protection from the night air. She then put on over her clustering curls her low-crowned hat, from which drooped a long ostrich plume, and attached to it a veil, to be used when necessary. Throwing the lace aside from her face, she took up her gloves and paused a moment in indecision.

"I have time," she then said, half aloud. "I will see papa again and tell him not to be anxious about me."

Laying aside her gloves, she turned down the light of the lamp and stole quietly into the dim corridor, where the shadows lurked thickly on every hand, and the only light came through the great arched window at the end. With a fleet and noiseless step Ilde passed along the hall, opened her father's door and entered his room, approaching his bedside.

A night lamp burned upon a low stand at the head of the bed, and by its light the girl saw that Sir Allyn was sleeping profoundly. Nature was claiming recompense for the sleepless days and nights of the last few weeks, and his slumbers were like the heavy, trance-like sleep following upon complete mental and physical exhaustion.

His thin, sharp features, framed in scanty grey hair, were thrown up in bold relief from his laced and ruffled pillow. His breathing was very faint and low, and one thin hand lay upon the blue satin coverlet, looking as if

sculptured from marble. How pale and wan he was! How sorrow-worn was his gentle, feminine face!

His devoted daughter felt her heart thrill with ineffable tenderness as she looked upon him. She felt as a loving mother feels when her child is enduring some terrible grief which she is unable to assuage; for Ilde's love for her father was, as has been said, of the protecting, motherly character. He had so long depended upon her for advice and comfort that their natural relations had entirely changed towards each other, and Ilde was become the strong-hearted protector and he the gentle dependant.

With a look like that a young mother bestows upon her sleeping babe, Ilde bent over the gray-haired, sorrow-stricken sleeper, and realized that upon the success of her plans depended not only his happiness but his very life. If she had needed encouragement before, that reflection would have served her for any task.

She lingered at his side but a moment. Pressing her lips to his wan forehead, she stole away as noiselessly as she had come and regained her own room without having been seen.

She had scarcely closed the door behind her when it opened again, giving ingress to Miss Arsdale, who came in almost noiselessly, the train of her riding-habit thrown over her arm and her hat in her hand.

"Are you ready, Ilde?" she asked, in a whisper, when she had locked the door securely.

"Quite ready, Kate," was Ilde's response. "You are in good time. It wants ten minutes of the appointed hour."

"Better early than late," said Miss Arsdale, seating herself and putting on her hat. "You have no misgivings, Ilde, have you, about this midnight escapade? You are not inclined to give it up now?"

"You would not ask that question, Kate, if you had seen papa as I saw him just now," answered Ilde. "He was asleep, but looked so worn-out, so wretched, so utterly exhausted, that my heart bled for him. He has sunk greatly since the coming of Therwell, and in order to save his life I must act promptly and with energy."

(To be continued.)

CONSTANCE CAREW.

CHAPTER XI.

"A WAR."

CONSTANCE is not over well pleased to find Myra walking with Mr. Catchbull, of whom she knows so little, and whom, personally, she does not like.

It is true that the girl's society was forced upon her, but still she feels responsible for her safety, and she knows from what she has seen and heard of Myra, that she will do the most reckless and imprudent things without a thought of consequences.

She greets the lawyer politely, but coldly, then addressing the girl, she says,—

"I have some shopping to do, I thought you would like to go with me."

"Yes, I should," responds Myra.

"Can I be of any assistance?" asks Mr. Catchbull, in his most insinuating manner.

"No, thank you," is the decisive reply, and she bows and turns away; but the lawyer is not to be dismissed so easily, and he lifts his hat with the remark,

"I shall see you again this evening," and goes off at a quick pace, to attend to his recently neglected business.

"Have you invited that man to call?" asks our heroine, in a tone of annoyance.

"I! no; certainly not! He is not my taste!" exclaims Myra, disdainfully. "I have not exchanged a dozen words with him,"

she continues. "I was talking with Edith Culver, when he came to her with a message from his sister, whose governess she is. When he recognized me he looked more civil, but I shouldn't wonder if Edith has a bad time of it!"

"Edith Culver here!" exclaims Constance in surprise. "How very odd. Did you tell her you are staying with me?"

"Yes, and she gave me a message for you," and Myra delivers it.

"Then she would not like me to call upon her, I suppose," remarks Constance; while Myra answers,—

"No, I think not. I doubt if she would have time to see and talk with you. She seemed dreadfully worried with a tribe of children, whom she described as 'ill-bred and unmanageable!'"

"Poor Edith!" sighs Constance. "If you meet her again tell her I shall be glad to see her whenever she has time to come, and tell her also, that I will call and see her if she can receive me alone, but I don't want to call upon Mr. Catchbull's sister."

"I will do so if I have a chance," is the reply.

Then they turn into a shop, and for the next hour are busily engaged in shopping.

They are leaving the last shop at which they mean to call, when they come full tilt against Kate Treleaven, who is glaring at Constance in a manner which the latter fails to observe.

"Good morning, Miss Treleaven," says our heroine, courteously.

But the latter fixes her with her stony gaze, curls her lip with infinite contempt, and giving her head a preposterous toss, passes on without condescending to utter a word or give the slightest sign of recognition.

Constance cannot understand being "out" in this fashion, and she looks after the enraged woman in wondering astonishment, while Myra, who only sees the comic aspect of the whole proceeding, and attributes Kate Treleaven's behaviour to jealousy, falls into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, the sound of which reaches Kate's ears, and helps to increase her exasperation.

"Hush! hush!" says Constance to her companion, "don't attract attention. It is very absurd of Miss Treleaven, and I am really glad she has out me, because I need concern myself no more about her; very absurd, I wonder she didn't know better."

"She doesn't seem to know much about good manners," remarks Myra, tears in her eyes with excessive laughter; "but I rather liked her sister."

"Yes, she is the best of the two," assents Constance.

And then she steadily changes the subject, not caring to discuss her father's prospects of matrimony with one, who after all is not her friend.

The rest of the day passes pleasantly enough with Constance, in arranging and rearranging the contents of the store-room, in which she again feels a proprietary interest, and old Jenifer helps her with a will; she is more excited even than her young lady, for in her heart she believes that the Captain's second marriage will never take place; while if it does, the new wife alone will not be half so objectionable as with her grown-up son and daughters.

Myra, however, finds the day very tedious and disappointing. Captain Carew went out this morning and does not return to luncheon, and Constance declines to go down on the shore, at any rate until the hottest part of the day has gone by, so Myra has either to go alone, or be satisfied with the house and garden until the moon tide heat is past.

"I am disappointed in Mr. Balderson," Myra muses. "I felt sure the moment I saw him that he would take me out in a boat whenever I wanted to go, but he seems to regard me as a mere child, and forgets that I am growing up. I am growing up fast, too, but I wish I were a little older; fifteen and

three-quarters is awfully young, and I'd give my ears to marry a baronet!"

She sighs, thinking how delightful it would be to be called "Lady So-and-so," and she speculates in her own scheming, narrow little way upon the possibility of diverting Sir Wilfred Marshall's devotion from Constance Carew to herself.

Thus the day passes quietly, and to all appearance uneventfully, and when Leonard Catchbull calls late in the afternoon, and asks first for Captain Carew and then for his daughter, he is answered with a "not at home," though he is morally certain all the time that if the young lady is not in the house she is not far distant.

He is not a man to be easily discouraged, however.

In the heated discussion which Captain Carew's arrival at Mrs. Treleaven's house last evening gave rise to he incurred the ire of all that lady's family, by unexpectedly riding with the Captain on the subject of settlements; and both Kate Treleaven and her brother rightly attributed this change of front to Catchbull's desire to win the favour of the young heiress by playing into the hands of her father.

Having thrown over his old friends in this shabby fashion, and abandoned all pretension to Kate Treleaven's hand, he feels that he has some claim upon the Carews, and thus he will come again and again feeling sure that the Captain, at any rate will not refuse to see him.

On the following day, however, things look much brighter for Myra. Constance and she go for a bathe in the sea, and a brisk walk afterwards; and on their return home they find Captain Carew and Mr. Balderson talking together like old friends.

But then the artist is always at home going where he will. It is one of the charms peculiar to the man that he is not too proud for a cottage nor too humble for a mansion.

A grand man in his way, thoroughly unconventional, always ready to take people for what they are in themselves rather than for what the world believes them to be.

In the course of conversation it transpires that he and Sir Wilfred Marshall met yesterday, and spent a couple of hours together. "Sir Wilfred tells me that he has a yacht in the harbour," Eric Balderson remarks, casually, to Captain Carew. "We were thinking of taking a few hours trip in it if you and the ladies would care to come."

"Oh, that would be delightful!" cries Myra, before any body else can utter a word.

"You want a sail!" says her host, good-naturedly. "Very well, we will go."

Constance says nothing. She would like the sail as well or better than any of the others perhaps, but she feels that under all the circumstances she ought not to go in Sir Wilfred Marshall's yacht, and yet how can she say so. How can she spoil the pleasure of all the party because of that dreadful secret which she has vowed to herself shall never pass her lips.

So her silence is taken for acquiescence, and Eric Balderson says casually that they had better fix eleven o'clock on the following morning for being on board the *Cormorant*, as the tide will then be at the flood.

"There are five of us. We could do with six if there is anybody else whom you would wish to invite, Miss Carew," he adds.

He is thinking of the threatened step-mother of whom he has heard, but Constance has for the time forgotten Mrs. Treleaven. A thought of her old schoolfellow, worried with troublesome children, and an exacting employer flashes through her mind, coupled with the desire to brighten her lot if only but for a few hours, and she answers, impulsively,—

"Myra told me yesterday that she met Edith Culver on the sands. You remember Miss Culver, don't you, Mr. Balderson? I have heard you tell her more than once that she would make a fairly good artist if she would only have patience and perseverance."

"You mean a girl about your own height, with dark eyes, a clever, thoughtful face, and a mistaken habit of speaking bitterly now and again, because she has to work for her living," he asks.

"The same," responds Constance, while Myra says, spitefully,—

"I call her a very plain face!"

"My dear child, you are not a competent judge," says the artist, quietly. "But what of Miss Colver, Miss Carew?"

Constance briefly explains the situation, and says she would like to invite her to join them.

"I don't suppose that Mrs. Rawlston will let her come," says Myra, who objects to this addition to the number.

"At any rate I can try," returns Constance, and as Mr. Balderson says,—

"Pray do. I should like to meet her again," Myra finds that her prejudices are not to be taken into consideration.

"There is one comfort, she won't be able to come," mutters Myra. "I'd ten times rather have the youngest of the two Treleaven girls—Nellie, I think they called her. She would be ever so much more fun."

"What are you mattering to yourself, Myra? That you would rather not go with us?" asks Eric Balderson, carelessly.

He considers Myra as quite a child still. He has known her as such for the past five years; a very troublesome child, too, at times, and he hopes for the sake of her aunts that she will be on her best behaviour while she is the guest of the Carews.

"No, I particularly want to go," she retorts, turning round sharply upon him. "But I was wondering if Miss Nellie Treleaven would not like to go with us, Miss Carew?"

The suggestion is an unlucky one, as she realises the moment after she has made it, for Captain Carew turns away with an unmistakable expression of annoyance on his countenance, and Constance says quietly, but in a tone which quite disposes of the master without giving the slightest reason for it,—

"Were you?"

That is all, but it makes Myra understand that it is not her part to settle who shall or shall not be of the party.

Mr. Balderson being here seems in no hurry to go away again. He stays to luncheon, and here still when afternoon tea is brought into the garden, and here Sir Wilfred Marshall finds him before the cups have been carried away.

Constance is considerably troubled by the Baronet's frequent visits. Tost he is here by the invitation of her father, she does not doubt, and but for the knowledge of that crime which haunts her when waking and sleeping, that is really never absolutely absent from her mind for half an-hour together, she would welcome him gladly, watch for his coming, and defer as long as she could the time of his departure.

As it is, she dreads to see him, because her heart will throb and beat as it never does at the approach of any other man, and her cheek will flush and the expression in her eyes will change, struggle she ever so resolutely against the temptation to which she must never yield.

Her manner is always reserved and often frigid when he is by. Her heart may beat wildly, her cheek may flush, her eyes may look half fascinated, half frightened, but her voice never betrays her into a word or an inflection that she would not use to the mere acquaintance.

She offers him tea—as she would do to any caller, and on his declining she goes into the house, where the cook is waiting to speak with her.

When she returns to the garden she finds that her father and Eric Balderson are going to Nutcombe Park with Sir Wilfred Marshall to dinner.

"And we are to be left here alone," pouts Myra like a spoilt child.

"I want to show Mr. Balderson some paintings I have," explains the Baronet.

"I like to see paintings as well as Mr. Balderson!" retorts Myra, while Constance, who has made up her mind not to check the girl in the presence of others, becomes pale with vexation, and turns to speak to the artist, though she cannot help hearing Sir Wilfred say, soothingly,—

"I expect my sister and her husband next week. Then I shall be able to invite Miss Carew and yourself, and I will show the pictures to you."

"That will be awfully jolly!" returns Myra. "And I suppose we must get over this evening as well as we can, and exist in anticipation of to-morrow. I feel quite excited at the idea of going out in your yacht."

"Are you a good sailor?" asks Sir Wilfred.

"I don't know. I was never on the sea," she replies. "That is why I am so eager to go."

"I understand. Well, I hope you will enjoy it," he replies, drily.

And then the gentlemen depart, and Myra, who knows well enough when she transgresses the unwritten law which well-bred people are careful to obey, expects a lecture from Constance, and prepares herself to meet it. She is a little disappointed therefore when the latter says, carelessly,—

"You will have to amuse yourself between now and dinner, Myra, for I have letters to write," then she goes to her own room to write a letter, which shall ensure a holiday for poor Edith Culver if she likes to take it. This is no easy task; but at length the epistle is finished, and old Jenifer is sent off with it, with instructions to wait for an answer.

Had Edith's employer been anyone but Mr. Catchbull's sister, Constance would have called to see her friend, and would have asked that she might be allowed to spend the day with her; but, independent of her aversion to the Treleavens, with whom Mrs. Rawlston will presumably be intimate, she is quite determined to discourage the lawyer's frequent visits, and this would be much more difficult if she were on friendly terms with his sister. Hence the necessity of writing to avoid further complications.

Jennifer is away a long time, but the answer she brings at last is satisfactory though it is contained only in the hastily scribbled words.

"Shall be able to come, delighted to do so; will be with you about ten A.M.—E. C."

There has been an unusually long spell of fine weather for our variable climate, and people, who assume to be weather-wise, predict an impending change.

But, to ordinary observers, there is no sign of bad weather this morning, unless it be in the pleasant coolness in the air, which is very agreeable by contrast with the oppressive heat which some people have found extremely trying.

Edith Culver is punctual in her arrival at Kilworthy House; she is attired in an exquisitely fitting costume of grey tweed, and pleasurable excitement has given her a faint colour, so that this morning she looks almost handsome.

"I came early on purpose to have a chat with you," she says to Constance, and then the two friends go off together, and Myra is not asked to join them.

Fortunately for the serenity of her temper, Mr. Balderson likewise comes early, and she is able to talk with him, and to ask questions about Nutcombe Park, and its owner, until the two other girls rejoin her.

Her eyes are upon Edith Culver's face when she and the artist meet; but Edith knows this, and is upon her guard, so Myra makes no fresh discovery.

Punctually at eleven, the party of five reach the Cormorant, where Sir Wilfred Marshall is waiting to receive them, and they are all unconscious that the Treleavens are watching them angrily, and that Leonard Catchbull and his sister are likewise looking at the

graceful yacht as it leaves the harbour, passes under shelter of the "Ness," and seeming to skim over the waves like a bird as it gets out into the open sea.

"Where do you mean to take us, Sir Wilfred?" asks Myra, as they leave the harbour.

"I thought we might run down to Dartmouth," replies the Baronet. "What do you say, Miss Carew?"

"I should like it very much!" replies Constance.

Then she leans back in her seat, and watches the sailors as they set the sails and steer the beautiful yacht.

"Oh, this is delightful!" cries Myra. "It is like being rocked, or like swinging in a hammock. I see that you enjoy it, Miss Carew. I never saw you looking so well; but perhaps it is the hat you wear that suits you or the company you are in."

"Perhaps both!" replies Edith, who for the moment feels too happy to resent this impertinence. So Myra rattles on for a little while; but, presently, to the relief of her companions her chatter ceases.

She becomes silent, pale, develops indeed all the symptoms of *mal de mer*, and she is taken to the handsome little cabin and handed over to the care of the skipper's wife, who for the time being is engaged to act as stewardess.

"What a comfort to be relieved of the presence of such a wasp," says Edith with a smile, and a sigh of contentment.

And the smile is reflected upon other lips, though Mr. Balderson says meditatively,—

"I should not call her a wasp, but a gadfly!"

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK NOW.

This day bids fair to be one of the most delightful that Edith and Constance have ever spent, the sea is far from smooth, the wind is high, and they sail on before it swiftly, like a white-winged bird.

The dark red cliffs gleam in the sunlight, and contrast with the sea-green of the water and the white of the seething foam which fringes the coast, and which crowns the crests of the waves, far as the eye can see.

In the petty annoyances that crowd into Edith's daily life, this holiday is like a glimpse into another world, while the mere fact of being in the society of Eric Balderson, gives a keener zest to her enjoyment; what wonder then that her eyes sparkle with unwonted animation, her cheeks flush with pleasure, and that those who had once thought her plain, begin to regard her as being positively handsome. She is so distinctly quiet and lady-like too, that Captain Carew once or twice reflects if she were only as wealthy as she is affable, he could very comfortably transfer his affections from Mrs. Treleaven to herself.

But Edith does not think of him, to her he is nothing more than the father of her friend, what does trouble her is the fear that Eric Balderson's heart is given to Constance.

Once or twice, she thinks she detects a lingering passionate glance in his wonderfully bright eyes, as they rest upon her friend's lovely countenance, and the same rapturous glance never seeks her own face; but she battles with the jealous feeling to which this dread gives rise, and tries to convince herself, that, if her fears are well-founded, she will not grudge Constance her happiness.

As for the latter, she is quite unconscious of the artist's love, and is too much occupied with her own anxieties and complications to even suspect that Edith can be jealous of her.

Since that day when he saved her from falling into the sea, and upon the sea-wall near Smuggler's Cove, offered her his hand and heart, Sir Wilfred Marshall has not spoken to Constance of his love, but he has paid her the most scrupulous attention, has been unchecked by her coldness, and now his devotion is patent enough to everybody, though she alone seems to ignore it.

If he speaks again of love, she may be impelled to tell him why she can never be more to him than she is now.

She may do so, but the probability is that she will not. How can she look into his eyes bent lovingly upon hers, and tell him that she knows him to be a murderer? Will it not be more easy to turn away with feigned aversion, and allow him to believe that she does not love him, rather than condemn him and herself to such needless pain and bitter mortification.

"No, he would always be in terror lest I should betray him," she thinks with a shudder. "It is better that we drift apart, the seeming victims to a misunderstanding."

Just as she has reached this melancholy conclusion, the yacht ships a sea, in other words, a wave breaks over her stern, deluging our heroine, while the sailors hasten to shorten sail, and prepare for the storm that is darkly gathering.

In the saloon, however, whether the ladies are advised to go, the sound of Myra's voice from the small cabin can be heard moaning,—

"I shall die! I shall die! Take me ashore, throw me overboard! Oh! oh!"

Constance at once goes to her aid, and finds her really so ill from sea sickness, that she sends the woman to ask Sir Wilfred Marshall if it is possible for them to land the suffering girl.

Sir Wilfred comes to her at once, and says,—

"We are off Torbay, perhaps it will be best for us all to land and return by rail, for I think we are going to have some rough weather. Tell Miss Myra that in half an hour we will be on shore, and none the worse for her experience."

Then he returns on deck to give orders for landing at Torquay.

"It is rather provoking to have our trip cut short in this manner," remarks Edith Calver, as she steps out of the boat which brings the party from the yacht to the pier.

"Yes, it is," replies Sir Wilfred, "particularly as the storm is blowing over; but we must have another trip before you go away, and we must leave Miss Myra at home."

"Yes, I'll never go to sea again," says Myra, who overhears the remark. "I never felt so ill in my life, I thought I was going to die, but I feel better now."

She looks better, though still she is limping and pale, and it is so evident that she has suffered severely, that the others say no more about their own disappointment, but at once set to work to find enjoyment on shore.

This, in a place like Torquay, is by no means difficult. Myra recovers as rapidly as she became ill, and they go to an hotel for luncheon, then walk and drive about the pretty watering-place, until Captain Carew declares it to be time to drive to the railway station to catch a certain train, so that they may get home in time for dinner.

The train which Captain Carew had meant to take is late, and the party of six saunter up and down the platform of this handsome railway station.

Eric Balderson is walking by the side of Constance, Sir Wilfred Marshall is dividing his attention between Edith and Myra, the latter being in one of her irresponsive moods, and determined not to be left to talk with an "old buff," as she disrespectfully, though merrily, designates Captain Carew.

Presently, as if by some simultaneous impulse, they all pause before the bookstall, and Constance, who is never allowed by her father to read a newspaper, involuntarily glances at the placarded contents of a Devonshire daily paper, and there, staring her in the face, and printed in large type are the words:

"The Teignmouth tunnel mystery; important clue!"

For an instant her heart seems to stop its beating; then involuntarily she turns to look at Sir Wilfred Marshall.

His face is unchanged by what he reads. He does not perceive the accusing light in the eyes

of the girl he loves, and he smiles carelessly at some trivial remark made by Myra, as though nothing in the finding of a clue to the mystery could in any way concern himself.

"What marvelous self-command," thinks Constance, clutching her hands in her effort to overcome her own agitation.

And then she sees him purchase a copy of the newspaper in question, thrust it into his pocket, and a second or two later the train comes into the station, they take their seats, and are soon on their way back to Teignmouth.

Constance, in the corner of a carriage, closes her eyes, and seems to be overcome with fatigue.

But in point of fact her mind is racked with dread as to what this important clue may be.

Sir Wilfred's indifference bewitches her. She could not have made a mistake in believing him guilty; of that she is firmly convinced. It was Sir Wilfred Marshall who at Exeter got into the carriage in which she had travelled from London. It was he who was afterwards alone in the carriage with that unfortunate man, whose face, if he were alive, she feels sure she would be able to recognise, so vividly is it imprinted on her memory.

She recalls the manner in which she kept an eye upon the door of the carriage before her, at both St. Germans and Dawlish, because, it will be remembered, she intended to speak to Sir Wilfred Marshall on reaching Teignmouth. And then, recurs to her mind again, the struggle she had become conscious was taking place in the carriage before her, as they passed through the second tunnel. The slamming of the carriage door, the opening of it again, and the shooting out of a figure into the dense darkness, made more terrible by the lights in the train.

Then, almost before they stopped at the Teignmouth platform, she saw Sir Wilfred leave the carriage hastily and disappear, and when she opened the door to recover her book and satisfy herself that she was the victim of a delusion, the man who had travelled from London was gone, and the pool of blood into which she placed her hand was overwhelming evidence that a crime had only just been committed.

Yes, and the man who committed that crime sits there before her, light-hearted and careless. A little concerned perhaps because she is looking so pale and tired, but otherwise in no way troubled with the burden of his guilt, the mere knowledge of which is so heavy upon her mind, that it is almost more than she can bear.

In consideration of the manner in which Constance has so suddenly collapsed, Sir Wilfred declines Captain Carew's invitation to return home with them to dinner, and he invites Mr. Balderson to come to Nutcombe Park with him, but the artist prefers the society of the ladies, and declines; so the Baronet, a little disappointed and vexed at having thus isolated himself, says good-bye to the others, steps into a fly, and is driven home.

Constance rouses herself as soon as he has left them, and Eric Balderson notices this, wonders at it, puts it together with two or three little circumstances which he has likewise observed, and almost comes to the conclusion that Constance has an aversion to the Baronet, but is compelled by her father to be civil to him.

"But the Captain shall not force her to marry Sir Wilfred, good fellow though he is," he mutters, resolutely. "I will save her from that fate, even though she is an heiress!"

So he resolves, and he is the man to keep his word, to sacrifice his own prejudices, his own feelings, and his own interests, for the welfare of the woman he loves.

They do not linger long over the dinner, or supper, as it might more correctly be termed.

Myra excuses herself and goes off to bed at once, and the artist volunteers to take Edith to her door.

"It is the most delightful day I have ever spent," says the poor governess, as she gives

him her hand at parting, and he little dreams that the crowning bliss of it all to her mind is in having had him to escort her home.

Thus they part: she to dream of him, and he to spend the night in troubled thought, thinking of another.

The following morning Constance has such a bad sick headache that old Jenifer insists upon her remaining quiet, and, consequently, Myra and Captain Carew have breakfast together.

But the meal is not a lively one, for the Captain has received a letter from Mrs. Treleaven, the contents of which greatly annoys him.

Directly the meal is over he goes off to his den, and Myra once again is left to her own resources.

Presently she dons her hat, and armed with a novel and a sunshade, starts off for the sands.

There is very little sand to walk upon at present for the tide is high; but there are plenty of seats vacant upon the lawn and the promenade, and she has not been seated long when the voice of Mr. Leonard Catchball at her elbow, says,—

"Good morning, Miss Myra, I hope you enjoyed your sail yesterday?"

"I suppose you have heard how ill I was?" she replies in an aggrieved tone.

"No, I have heard nothing about it," he answers, and he takes the seat by her side, and manages the conversation so adroitly that he is presently in possession of a full and particular account of yesterday's proceedings. He has likewise asked a few leading questions, and has learnt Myra's opinion with regard to Mr. Balderson's sentiments towards Constance Carew and Edith Calver.

"Then I am afraid you had not such a very pleasant day after all," he says, briskly, "and that reminds me of a little present I bought for you yesterday. I felt sure that you would accept it."

"A present for me!" exclaims Myra, her eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"Yes; don't examine it now," he says, caustically, "curious eyes are watching us. Let me look at your book, I will give it to you under cover of returning it."

And he does so, while she mutters,—

"How kind of you!" and then manages without being observed by anyone else to convey the morocco jewel case to her pocket.

She quite understands that this is a bribe, but she is accustomed to be bribed.

Most of the big girls in her aunt's school, and all the rich ones, have at various times, given her presents of money, or jewellery, or clothes to do something for them, which they were unable or unwilling to do for themselves.

So she does not feel the shame and humiliation which any girl of a higher moral standard than herself would feel at taking this man's presents, and he perceives it, and experiences a sensation of disappointment, like one who has made a bad investment for he understands that although she accepts his bribe she is too covetous and too reckless of consequences to feel herself in his power.

She will help him to a certain extent, however, and this may be all that he will require.

His next remark shows her the nature of the service he expects at her hands, for he says,—

"I mean to call at Kilworth House this afternoon. I suppose you and Miss Carew will be at home?"

"Oh, yes, we are sure to be," is the reply.

"She has a headache, and will be certain not to go further than the garden."

"When I call I think I shall ask for you," he next remarks. "You have no objection, have you?"

"No," she answers, reluctantly, "Not much, at any rate," she continues, with an awkward laugh.

"Do you know why Miss Carew is never 'at home' to me?" he asks, fixing his red-brown eyes suspiciously upon her face.

"No, I don't," she responds, with evident sincerity. "Miss Carew never talks to me



["YOU WILL HAVE TO RECKON WITH ME AS WELL AS HER!" SAYS ERIC BALDERSON, WITH CLENCHED FIST AND FLASHING EYES.]

about the people she likes or dislikes, but it may be because she thinks you are a friend of the Treleavens, and though she has never said so in my hearing I know she detests them."

"But I have proved that I am her father's friend rather than theirs," he protests.

Myra shrugs her shoulders, clearly intimating that on this point she is powerless to help him.

"Well, I shall call this afternoon," he says, rising to leave her, "and if I give you a hint on any subject be sure you follow it up. I shall probably bring you a book or a magazine, which I am supposed to promise to you now."

"Yes, that will be best," she returns. "I shall not then be taken to task for asking you to call."

So they part, and although Myra is burning with curiosity to know what the case in her pocket contains, she does not take it out and look at it until she has gained the privacy of her own room, then she locks the door behind her, and examines her prize.

It is a gold link bracelet, very handsome, simple, and in exquisite taste, while the cost of it must have been at least from eight to ten pounds.

"Well, this is handsome!" she reflects, trying it on and admiring it upon her wrist. "I wonder what made him give me anything so expensive? It wasn't surely just for the sake of calling this afternoon?"

The gong sounding for luncheon warns her to hide away her new possession, and when she reaches the dining-room she finds Constance looking a trifle paler than usual, but talking cheerfully with her father and Eric Balderson, who is again here.

Nothing worthy of record occurs until two or three hours later when the party are upon the lawn under the shade of the wide-spreading cedars.

The weather has become intensely hot again. Walking for pleasure is quite out of

the question. It is too hot to sew, too hot to read, though Eric Balderson is busily sketching, and Captain Carew is lounging in a deck chair, attired in the lightest of summer garments.

Constance wears white, as she usually does in very hot weather, and Myra by way of contrast has put on a cast-off gown of one of her aunt's former pupils. It is a Sura silk old rose in tint, very artistically made, and though it has seen its best days, it looks picturesque under the branches of the dark cedars.

Myra is not quite at ease, and she feels most distinctly uncomfortable when a servant approaches her, and says,—

"Mr. Catchbull is in the drawing-room, and wants to see you, miss."

"Oh, bring him here," she says, carelessly, without glancing at anyone, and as neither the Captain nor his daughter command the order Mr. Catchbull speedily joins them.

He is very cordial with Captain Carew and deferential to Constance, who receives him coldly. He bows to Mr. Balderson, then hands a small book to Myra with the remark,—

"There is the book, Miss Myra, that I promised to bring you!"

She takes it, thanks him, and just then tea is brought and placed upon a small table, and Mr. Catchbull seats himself in a rustic chair and talks to the Captain like a man who means to be quite at home.

So Constance gives him tea also, though she directs most of her conversation to the artist, and when Captain Carew goes into the house to fetch something he wants, the lawyer says a few words in a low tone to Myra, then rises, as though he would bring back his cup to the table.

Constance rises too. Why, she could not say, except that there is something in this man's glance that makes her heart quail, though outwardly she looks calm and self-

possessed; and at this moment Myra Barlow exclaims with her most childish manner,—

"Oh, Miss Carew, I want you to lend me the 'Mystery of the White Friar!' Edith Culver says she gave it to you when you left school that you might read it in the train."

"I—have—lost—it!" replies Constance.

That is all. The words come slowly and faintly from her lips, her tall slender form awakes like a reed in a storm. Those burning red-brown eyes seem to pierce her heart and read the secret hidden therein. The next instant her eyes have closed and she is lying on the soft sward in a deep swoon.

"She has knocked the funny bone in her elbow. I know she has," cries Myra. "I fainted once with doing the same thing myself. Throw cold water on her face quickly!"

But no one heeds her. Leonard Catchbull is standing looking at the insensible girl with an expression of diabolical triumph upon his ugly face. He is on the right track now. With the identification of the owner of that compromising volume the rest of the mystery can be unravelled easily—unless she agrees to his terms.

He is considerably startled, therefore, when Eric Balderson steps forward with clenched fist and flashing eyes, and says in low, threatening, but clearly distinct tones,—

"You will have me to reckon with as well as her!"

(To be continued.)

THE reason why ships are not struck by lightning is attributed by German authorities to the general use which is now made of wire rope for rigging purposes, as well as to the fact that the hulls of ships are usually constructed of iron or steel. Thus the whole ship forms an excellent and continuous conductor, by means of which the electricity is led away into the ocean before it has time to do any serious damage.



[SIR GEOFFREY SAW A SLIGHT, BLACK ROBED FIGURE WITH BUSHY BROWN HAIR, COILED IN THICK PLAITS ROUND HER HEAD.]

NOVELLETTE.]

A FAMILY MATTER.

CHAPTER I.

"It is so terribly shocking," said Lady Jane Meadows to her dear friend and neighbour, Mrs. Bertram. "My dear boy is only twenty-nine, and yet his whole life is blighted by this fearful mistake."

Mrs. Bertram, a plump, motherly creature, with as much kindness of heart as could be found anywhere, and a fund of sympathy, on which her friends were never tired of drawing, shook her head with a gentle sigh, and admitted that it was one of the saddest things she had ever heard of.

"Well, you know," said Lady Mary Stone, who was sister to Lady Jane and aunt to the young man whose life was "blighted," "I'm not so sure but what there is something to be said on both sides. Geoffrey must have fancied himself in love with this—this young person, or, I suppose, he wouldn't have married her."

If eyes could have killed, the angry glances of the two matrons would certainly have annihilated Lady Mary. It was her sister who answered her in a frigid tone.

"Geoff behaved with the most perfect propriety; as a man of honour he could not have acted differently."

"I thought you said he made a fearful mistake," observed Aunt Mary.

The mother went on as though she had not heard the interruption.

"Geoffrey was on a shooting expedition when he met this girl and her brother. They seemed to him decent, respectable people, and seeing the brother's state of health, he did all he could to help them, and when Mr. Sykes was dying, rode a hundred miles to fetch a doctor. The doctor was a meddling

busy-body, and chose to suggest that Geoffrey had compromised Miss Sykes by his attentions, and ought to marry her. My boy, who has the softest heart in the world, agreed with this interfering doctor, and offered his hand to a girl who probably had never met a civilised Englishman in her life before.

"A minister cropped up—from, no one knows where—and they were married by the brother's death-bed in the most melo-dramatic style imaginable. Mr. Sykes died the next day, and the bridal pair made their way back to Minnesota, where they intended to take their passage to England. They put up at the best hotel in the place. I don't suppose it was very grand, for you can't expect English comforts in the far west. Anyway, Geoff did the best he could for his bride, and left her to rest while he went to make inquiries about the steamers.

"He was gone perhaps two hours. When he got back there was no trace of his wife. He cross-questioned the hotel people, he made inquiry in every direction; but though he delayed his voyage and remained a month in Minnesota, he never heard any more of her. She had vanished like a shadow."

"How shocking!" said Mrs. Bertram, kindly. "It was almost enough to break Sir Geoffrey's heart."

"Only his heart was not in the matter," said Lady Mary, quietly.

"So for two long years," went on Lady Jane, "my boy has been a wanderer on the face of the earth, roaming from one country to another, never staying long anywhere, and never once visiting his home; but this spring I took the girls abroad, and poor Geoffrey met us by appointment in Paris. I pressed him to tell me the cause of his roving habits. I told him he had duties he owed to his family and his tenants. I urged him to come home."

"In fact," said Lady Mary, "you drove the poor boy into a corner and he was obliged to tell you the story of his misfortune; but, pardon me, my dear Jane, I don't think he

meant you to take the world at large into your confidence."

"Oh, Mrs. Bertram is quite one of ourselves, she has known Geoff ever since he was a little fellow in Eton jackets."

Something like a tear glittered in Mrs. Bertram's bright eyes. She was thinking of her only daughter, a girl who had been a little white-frocked maid at the time Geoff wore those Eton jackets just referred to.

Alice and the heir of Meadow View had been little lovers then. The mother could never think indifferently of Lady Jane's son when she remembered his grief at Alice's death.

It was an old story now. Alice had been in her grave ten long years, and Geoff was twenty-nine, the husband of a wife who had forsaken him.

"You may trust me," Mrs. Bertram said gently to Geoff's mother; "but won't it be a little awkward for Sir Geoffrey if everyone in the neighbourhood thinks him a bachelor?"

"He ought to be set free," said Lady Jane, with a ring of bitterness in her voice. "The marriage law is very lax. I have always heard, in some parts of America, why can't Geoff get a divorce; it is over two years since he heard anything of his wife? She left him within a week of their wedding. Surely there have been divorces granted on less grounds than that!"

"Only Geoff happens to be English and a gentleman," said Lady Mary, drily. "In my opinion he would be false to his position if he took advantage of his wife's being friendless and alone. Let him sacrifice everything in the world to discover her fate, but let him be braver than to make the law of her country condemn her unheard."

"You always have such peculiar notions, dear Mary," said her sister, reproachfully. "Positively you seem to think this dreadful mistake poor Geoff's fault instead of his misfortune. Must you really go?" as Mrs.

Bertram rose with rather a resolute air to say good-bye.

"I really must, for I see it is nearly five o'clock, and I want to be at home in time to receive my new companion, whom I am expecting this afternoon."

"I will walk with you," said Lady Mary; "it is getting time I went home. Good-bye, Jane; don't bear malice because I can't pity poor Geoffrey so much as you do. By the way, do the girls know of this?" she hesitated, "this family matter?"

"Not a word! I am most anxious it should not get abroad, but I know I can trust Mrs. Bertram and you, too, Mary."

Meadow View was a beautiful estate in Hertfordshire, which had been in the possession of the Meadows family for untold generations. Unhappily, the late Baronet had been frightfully extravagant, and deeply encumbered the fair acres.

Sir Geoffrey found himself with a bare eight hundred a year after the interest on the mortgages was paid. His mother had the use of the house for her life, unless he married, when, by Sir James' will, she would remove with her daughters to the town house, her own fortune having been a large one. Lady Jane was richer than her son, she took on herself all the expense of keeping up Meadow View, and the neighbours had long since decided Sir Geoffrey could not afford to marry unless he won an heiress.

Mrs. Bertram and Lady Mary walked in silence down the avenue of limes. Both of them were rich, for one was a wealthy, childless widow, while the other, a spinster, enjoyed a fortune equal to that which her sister Jane had received as a marriage portion. They were firm friends, and Mrs. Bertram understood the plain-spoken and rather sharp-tempered Lady Mary better even than her own sister did, and knew that in spite of her coarse remarks she was really sorry for her nephew.

"This is a bad business," said Lady Mary abruptly, as they passed through the lodge gates out into the village lane, "it all comes of my brother-in-law's extravagance. If Geoff had had an income suited to his position he wouldn't have wanted to go roaming about in Columbia, and trying life out West just as though an English Baronet couldn't find plenty to do at home."

"Lady Jane feels it terribly I am afraid." "Of course she does. She just worships Geoff, and he's not a bad young fellow after all, though he has contrived to make an awful muddle of his affairs."

Mrs. Bertram hesitated.

"I suppose your sister told us all she knew. There is nothing worse?"

"Oh, dear, no. In fact Jane painted the matter rather blacker than usual this afternoon. It's just a piece of foolish Quixotism on Geoff's part, because the doctor—just out from England and not in the least used to the ways of outlandish places—thought he ought to marry Miss Sykes, he proposed to her. Why, it was absurd. The 'attentions' the meddling man made so much of were only common acts of Christian charity, and if only the boy had had a little common-sense, he would have known it was true kindness to escort the girl back to her own people, than marry her without a spark of love."

"Then she had people?"

Lady Mary looked put out.

"Of course she had," she said, quickly, "or else what has become of her all this time, depend upon it when it came to the point of leaving her own country and going to England with a man she hardly knew, the girl remembered her relations and felt she could not give them up."

"But what would you advise Sir Geoffrey to do?" asked Mrs. Bertram, rather artfully, "since you think it would be wrong to seek a divorce, and you must admit his present position is full of difficulty."

"He is not likely to seek my advice. If he had done the most sensible thing he would

have stayed out there until he had found either his wife or her grave. He's made such a mess of his affairs now that I don't see what is to come of them."

"And the girls are to know nothing?"

"Nothing—my sister thinks it would spoil their chances. Pretty chances they have," went on the aunt candidly, "when Hilda is twenty-seven and not one of the five have ever had an offer in their lives."

"And yet they are nice girls."

"There's not much in them," said Aunt Mary, coolly, "and they expect a great deal in their husbands. They'll find out the difference when their mother dies, her jointure goes back to the estate. So does half her fortune. The five girls will only have two thousand pounds a-piece, and if Geoffrey's wise man he won't ask them to live with him."

"I always thought Charles Neville fancied Grace," said Mrs. Bertram, hopefully, "the Meadows and the Nevilles have always been so intimate."

"And Edith Neville has fifty thousand pounds from her mother, which Jane thought made her a desirable wife for Geoffrey. I used to think something would come of it myself, but the lad was too clever not to see the snare laid for him, and, as my belief, he went to America just to avoid Miss Neville!"

"You will come in," said Mrs. Bertram cordially, as they reached her house, a pretty, white stone dwelling, standing in a pleasant flower garden.

"Not to-night, thanks. You'll be wanting to welcome your new companion, and I'm not in the humour for strangers. I feel put out."

Mrs. Bertram smiled.

"You must come and see Miss Leslie another time. You know you like girls, Lady Mary, though you profess not to!"

Lady Mary tried hard not to smile but failed.

"You'll never keep her," she said, snapishly. "It's a wonder you don't give up having a companion, Mrs. Bertram, for not one of them has ever stayed two years at the Lawn."

"I can't help it," said the widow, cheerfully. "The fact is I like young girls. I should hate to be shut up with a middle-aged woman like myself—and young girls have a knack of marrying."

"You might as well call your house a matrimonial agency at once," said the spinster, reprovingly, "In the last six years you have had five companions to my certain knowledge, and—every one of them has married."

It was quite true. For some years after Alice's death, a niece lived with Mrs. Bertram when her parents returned to England and claimed their daughter, the lonely mistress of the Lawn made her first trial of a salaried companion. She found a charming girl who, after eighteen months' stay, left her to marry the curate of the village. The other four had one and all followed Miss Brown's example in accepting a wedding-ring, only, to do them justice, it was not always offered by a curate.

"I don't think it is my fault," said Mrs. Bertram, cheerfully. "Two were engaged before ever they came to me. I took Miss Smart abroad, and when I had my serious illness, she nursed me as a daughter, and fell in love with the doctor who attended me. My first and last ventures as you know, married the Meadow View curate."

"Well," said Lady Mary, consolingly, "our new rector, Mr. Blake, never has any thing but married curates, so that temptation will be spared Miss Leslie. There is not to my knowledge an unmarried man within ten miles except Charles Neville whom I regard as Grace's property, so it is just possible you may keep Miss Leslie."

"I shall try!"

The Lawn was the prettiest house for its size in the neighbourhood. It had been built by Mrs. Bertram's father, a former rector of Meadow View, who, foreseeing the time when

his wife and daughter would have to vacate the Rectory, had prepared this pleasant home for them. Mrs. Bertram had left it a bride, and returned a widow with her little Alice. Her husband's wealth was so great she could easily have purchased an estate or set up a town establishment, but she preferred to make her girlhood's home her chief abode, sometimes leaving it to servants for months while she travelled on the continent or went south to avoid an English winter.

It was August, and the sun poured down his warm rays upon the white stone walls of the Lawn, lighting up the pretty little place, and making it strangely attractive. Roses and honeysuckle climbed up the pillars which supported the verandah on which two or three hammock chairs stood invitingly. Mrs. Bertram glanced at her watch as she entered the pretty, flower-scented hall.

"Just in time. The carriage ought to be here in ten minutes. Bring tea as soon as you hear it, Jones."

The grey-haired butler, who acted as Mrs. Bertram's sole male retainer indoors, had already prepared the pretty rustic table which stood invitingly close to the French windows of the drawing-room, these opened on to the verandah. Mrs. Bertram sat down on the sofa and began to remove her gloves.

She was a pretty woman still, though some years over forty. She had a plump, comely face, and an air of motherliness which made her a special favourite with the young.

Her drawing room looked just what you would have expected to see as the favourite apartment of such a single, kindly woman. It was long and low-roofed, the windows down one side opened on to the verandah, glass doors at one end led to the conservatory, but winter comforts were not forgotten, a large old-fashioned grate was conveniently near one of those "cozy corners" now so much in vogue, the carpet was thick and warm, and there were soft rug scattered about.

The furniture was quaint rather than luxurious. Only the spindle-legged tables and chairs which had been brought to the Rectory some fifty years before by Mrs. Bertram's mother from her old home, to these had been added such modern comforts as a broad, deliciously restful-looking sofa, a grand piano, and a rosewood davenport. There were cabinets of old chintz and "blue pots" enough to charm the heart—aye! and rouse the envy—of a collector; but yet the room was essentially home-like.

There might be evidences of wealth if you sought for them, but there was nothing of ostentatious display.

As she sat waiting for the carriage, Marion Bertram found herself thinking over the little she knew of Miss Leslie, and wondering how she should get on with her latest protégé.

This time she had not advertised for a companion, and had been persuaded to "try" Miss Leslie at the urgent request of Katy Lestrade, companion number four, who had been ensnared into matrimony by the English doctor at Pont aux Dames.

Hearing her successor had actually deserted her old friend for the curate of Meadow View, who had obtained a living and was leaving Hertfordshire, Mrs. Lestrade wrote promptly to recommend Mrs. Bertram a new companion.

"You know, Jack's sisters keep a school," ran the young lady's letter, "and they are very anxious to find a home for a girl who has been with them for two years as pupil teacher. Miss Leslie is only twenty. She is very clever and accomplished, but she is not strong enough to go on in her present sphere. My sisters-in-law can't bear to give her notice because she has no home to go to, and they are trying very hard to find her an easier situation. I saw her when I was over last Christmas, and quite lost my heart to her. The moment I heard you were alone I thought if only you could be persuaded to try Miss Leslie her fortune would be made."

And Marion Bertram, touched by what she

heard, had promised to "try" Miss Leslie, and had actually remained a month companionless that that young lady might not inconvenience the principals of Acacia House, Brighton, by leaving them before the holidays.

"She will be hideous," reflected Mrs. Bertram, rather nervously, as she sat waiting for the sound of the returning brougham, "accomplished girls who have overexposed their strength always are; besides, Katy LeStrange knows my weakness for pretty faces, and if she possibly could have praised up Miss Leslie's looks she would. Oh, dear! I hope she doesn't squint. I am quite prepared for red hair and freckles!"

Changes had come to Meadow View in the last weeks. The old rector had died and a new one arrived, a middle-aged bachelor, who—rather to the chagrin of the ladies of the place—announced he should never employ any but married curates.

He brought one with him, a good, sensible fellow of forty, with a homely, domesticated wife, who wore a poke bonnet, and went in largely for good works.

A sound of wheels. Mrs. Bertram did not go out into the hall. She was feeling distinctly nervous. After meeting five companions, and finding them all more or less charming, she absolutely felt alarmed at the prospect of greeting number six.

If the girl were hopelessly ugly. If she were one of the new school, and talked of nothing but the higher education of women, how terribly dreary the winter would be.

"I must keep her six months," thought poor Mrs. Bertram, helplessly, "or it will seem so unkind. Well, at any rate, I can give her an easy time, and try to make her stronger; but, oh! I dread the thought of it!"

"Miss Leslie, madam!" announced Jones, with as much respect as though he had been ushering in a duchess.

Marion Bertram started. Had Kitty LeStrange been playing a trick on her? Was she the victim of a dream? Surely there must be some egregious mistake somewhere.

This girl looked more like the petted child of fond parents, who has never known a trouble, than a poor little junior teacher, whose health had broken down beneath her exertions; but hospitality was the widow's first thought, and forgetting her surprise, she said, kindly,—

"My dear, I am delighted to see you!"

Something very like a tear trembled in the girl's velvety brown eyes, and her voice faltered so that she could not speak, seeing which Mrs. Bertram changed her mind, and instead of a formal handshake stooped and kissed the fair cheek, saying,—

"You must sit down here and have some tea. I am afraid you are very tired."

Gladys Leslie took the seat pointed out by her hostess on the sofa. She was a slight, childlike creature, with a lovely complexion, coils of thick, ruddy brown hair, and the loveliest eyes Mrs. Bertram had ever seen; but as the widow looked at her again a second time, she understood the truth of Mrs. LeStrange's letter.

Gladys Leslie did seem strangely delicate, and in spite of her beauty, of her graceful manners, and perfect breeding there was about her a strange shrinking timidity, as though she had known many troubles.

She wore a dress of the softest possible cashmere, a plain straw hat trimmed with velvet. All her attire was black except a soft white silk tie, knotted carelessly round her neck.

"Did you leave Brighton to-day?" asked Mrs. Bertram, trying hard to be commonplace and longing all the while to throw her arms round the lonely girl and ask her why she looked so sad.

"Yes, at ten o'clock; but I had to take some of the girls home and to wait with others at Victoria till they were met, or I would have come here earlier."

"You look dreadfully tired."

Gladys smiled wistfully.

"I don't think it is to-day that has tired me. The last week of the term is always rather trying, there is so much to do."

"Do you like teaching?"

"I hate it."

"Oh!" and Mrs. Bertram gave a sigh of intense satisfaction. "I am so glad. Please don't think me mad, but after everything was settled I began to be so afraid you would turn out a very learned young lady, and scorn all my simple amusements."

Gladys smiled.

"I don't think you can possibly have been so frightened as I was. The Misses LeStrange gave me so many directions and reminded me so often of your goodness in 'trying me' that I began to be almost dazed."

Mrs. Bertram laughed outright.

"You should have asked Dr. LeStrange's wife about me. I am sure she wouldn't have made me out terrible."

"I saw her last Christmas. How pretty she is!"

"Not half so pretty as you are," thought Mrs. Bertram, but aloud she only said,—

"I suppose the doctor's sisters are much older?"

"Oh, yes. Past fifty, I should think. They are very kindmeaning people, but rather awe-inspiring. My mother was one of their pupils long ago, and when I—I was left alone I thought I would rather work under them than anyone else."

"Your mother is dead?"

"Oh, yes," and the girl's voice had only a chastened sadness. "She died before my father. She was not strong, and I think the hardships killed her. Father always said so. Of course, I can't remember, for I was only nine years old."

"And you have no relations?"

"I have no relations in the whole world," said Gladys Leslie, sadly. "You can't think how desolate it makes me feel sometimes."

Mrs. Bertram would have liked to ask what was the profession, trade, or calling of the late Mr. Leslie, and what hardships killed his wife, but pity for the girl's sad, tired face kept back the question, and as soon as Gladys had finished her tea she proposed to take her upstairs.

"Your room is next mine," she said, kindly. "This is not a very large house, and as a rule I live alone with my companion. I hope you are not frightened at the prospect after leaving so many young people?"

"I was glad to leave Brighton," confessed Gladys. "The girls did not like me. They said I was no grave, and Miss LeStrange was always telling me I had not enough authority, and somehow I always felt so tired."

"Poor child!" said her new friend, kindly. "You will have time to rest here. Meadow View is a very small place, and though I know everyone here my acquaintances aren't numerous enough to trouble you."

Left alone in the pretty octagon chamber, Gladys Leslie threw herself into an easy chair and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

It was strange. She had left a situation where she was no favourite and had to work tolerably hard to earn her bread. She had come to one where she would be treated more as daughter than employé, where she would have the daintiest fare, the tenderest courtesy, and in time warm affection, and yet her first impulse on being left alone was to seek the relief of tears.

"It is a terrible risk," murmured the girl, when at last her sobs ceased and she grew calmer, "an awful risk, but anything was better than sitting down with my misery."

CHAPTER II.

NEVILLE COURT was the second house in importance in the little place, and Edith Neville, with fifty thousand pounds, was considered "quite an heiress," while her half-brother Charles was a downright good fellow,

who farmed his own acres as his father had done before him, was an excellent son to his gentle mother. Both of them were kindness itself to the stately Edith, and tried hard to keep from her and even from each other how great they would have felt the relief of her marriage.

The old Squire had been twice married, once to an heiress, the second time to the nursery governess of his pretty little daughter.

Amy Neville was a gentle woman in every sense of the word, but she could not control the imperious temper of her step-child. Edith ruled the Court just as she had done before her father's marriage.

Even the birth of an heir did not shake the old man's devotion to his first-born, and when he died he left her as well provided for as was in his power, giving her beside her own mother's portion a clear half of his savings, and the right to live at the Court so long as she remained unmarried.

The Court itself he left to his wife for her life, with reversion to his son. Charles had only an immediate legacy of five thousand pounds. He was to live with his mother, and when of age manage the property as her paid manager.

If only Edith had married, if only she had been of a different disposition, Neville Court would have been the happiest homestead in the county. As it was, she ruled there with a despotic sway, insisting on an establishment being kept up suitable to her ideas of her own position, choosing her stepmother's visitors and as far as possible making Mrs. Neville a nonentity in her own house, while she persistently treated Charles as a boy, probably because she knew people would remember she was eight years old at the time of his birth, and wished to prevent them from doing a little addition sum and, by confessing he was twenty-four, publish the fact she had passed thirty by two years.

The Nevilles and the Meadows had been sworn friends for years, and everyone at the Court would have been unfailingly delighted by Sir Geoffrey's marrying Edith, while until she heard of the insuperable obstacle on her son's part, Lady Jane had been more than willing to receive Edith as her daughter-in-law.

"What will you give me for some news?" asked Charles Neville, pleasantly, when he entered the drawing-room one evening after a long conversation with his managing bailiff in the little sanctum he called his study.

"There's never any news worth having," said Edith, petulantly, "this place is as dull as ditch water, and I have a great mind to go abroad for the winter!"

What an immense relief it would have been to the other two had she carried out this oft-repeated threat; but both Mrs. Neville and Charles knew it was hopeless, grumble as she might at the Court, she had free quarters there, and she loved money. Also, as Miss Neville, of Neville's Court, she had a better chance of meeting good society than as Miss Neville, of nowhere travelling alone with a maid.

"Well," said Charles, cheerfully, "perhaps the place will get a little gayer to welcome the lord of the manor. Geoffrey Meadows has come home."

"He's been coming for weeks," said Edith, languidly. "There's no truth in it, it's only a rumour started by Lady Jane because people are beginning to think his absence strange."

"You are too sceptical, Edie," returned her brother, "as it happens, Sanders had been over to Hempstead market, and came back in the same train as Sir Geoffrey. He says Lady Jane met him herself at the station, so I don't think there can be any mistake this time."

Edith fidgeted with the string of pearls round her neck. She always dressed well, too well, gentle Mrs. Neville sometimes thought, considering the quietness of their daily life.

To-night she wore a soft blue silk, very long

and flowing, the low bodice and elbow sleeves finished off with rare old lace, more fit for a party than a family dinner.

She was tall and elegantly formed. Her figure inclining ever so slightly to *embonpoint*, her features were regular but too cold; her blue eyes were too light, a fault shared by their brows and lashes, which, unless assisted by art were well-nigh invisible. A handsome, stylish looking woman, with attractions of her own besides those golden ones, but not the sort of face which would haunt a man's memory, and steal his heart in spite of himself.

"Well," she said, calmly, her firm white fingers still trifling with the pearls at her throat, "I am sure it is high time Sir Geoffrey did return. He must have been away two years."

"Nearly three," replied her brother, "he went directly after Christmas."

"And he has travelled half over the world," put in gentle Mrs. Neville. "How glad Lady Jane must be to see him safe at home again, and it will make a great difference to the girls to have a brother to take them about."

"Brothers never care to be of use to their sisters," said Edith, bitterly. "It's other people's sisters they like to escort."

This was a cut at Charles, who had refused to drive her to a distant garden party the week before, and whom she had met there in close conversation with Grace Meadows, the youngest and prettiest of Lady Jane's daughters.

"Oh, I know what you mean," said the young Squire, laughing; "but you're quite out of it, Edith. I couldn't drive you to Monkswood because one of the ponies was lame, and I knew you wouldn't condescend to the cart."

"And you took Grace in your cart. Nice doings I must say. I hope your mother approves!"

"I did not drive Grace Meadows to Monkswood," retorted Charles, nettled for once. "Lady Jane asked me if I would bring her daughter home as she wanted to leave early, and Miss Grace was playing in the last tennis match."

"And," interposed gentle Mrs. Neville, trying to restore peace, "you know the Meadows are such old friends; why, when your dear father had that long illness, and Charley was a little fellow of eight, he almost lived in the nursery at Meadow View. Lady Jane treated him quite like her own child."

Edith, who at that time had been a boarding school miss, and so had not been included in Lady Jane's hospitality, felt crosser than ever at this reminder.

"Of course, mamma, if you choose to blind yourself to what is going on under your eyes I can't help it. That girl has set her mind on being mistress of the Court, and marrying Charles, which is absurd, as they are both a couple of children!"

The heiress flounced out of the room, Mrs. Neville glanced quickly at her son; perhaps the aunt had awoke him to a knowledge of his own secret, perhaps he had never known how much he cared for his old play-fellow till this minute, for a dull red flush dyed his face, and he did not meet his mother's eyes.

"Charley," she asked, gently, "is it so? Grace is the dearest little girl in the world, and I have sometimes fancied you had found it out."

He sighed heavily.

"What is the use of it, mother? Yes, I love her. There's no use denying it. I expect I have been in love with her more or less for years; but—I can't marry her even if she were willing!"

Mrs. Neville opened her eyes.

"Why not? I don't think Grace has extravagant notions, and, my dear boy, I need not tell you all I have is yours in fact if not in name!"

Charles went over to her couch and kissed her.

"I know you would be all kindness, mother, but it's my father's will."

Mrs. Neville started.

"I'm sure there was nothing in that against your marrying. If it will smooth matters, I can double your salary; I don't need much money after the expense of keeping up the Court is paid, and—"

"Mother dear, it isn't that. By my father's will, Edith has a right to a home at the Court so long as she is unmarried. You know what we suffer from her temper. Do you think I would bring Gracie to a home where she would be shown day after day she was unwelcome?"

Mrs. Neville looked more troubled still.

"Edith is quite rich enough to start a home of her own. She can't have spent a quarter of her income all these years. I should say she must have three thousand a year by this time, and the Court itself brings in no more."

"But we can't make her leave us, even if we could bring ourselves to tell her we preferred her absence. We have no legal power to enforce our wish. By the terms of my father's will she has the right to remain here till she marries."

Mrs. Neville's face fell.

"I don't think she will marry now."

"Nor I."

"But, Charley, your whole life's happiness can't be sacrificed to her. It is terrible!"

"Yes" he said, with a sigh; "but I don't see any alternative. My wife's life would be miserable if she were forced to spend it beneath the same roof as Edith."

Mrs. Neville took her son's broad hand in her thin white one. A very delicate, gentle woman she was, yet strong to brave discomfit for her boy's sake. She had put up with Edith's temper for years, but she was ready to rebel now if it were for Charley's happiness.

"Your father has been dead so long," she began, in a troubled tone, and I—I never cared to worry much about worldly matters. Can you tell me how the will is worded, there might be some way of evading Edith's company?"

Charles shook his head.

"The Court is left to you, mother, for your life, and so long as you live there, and she is unmarried, Edith can claim a right to reside with you."

Mrs. Neville smiled.

"How would it be if I were to let the Court go south for a year?"

"Let the Court! Why, mother, it seems like sacrilege to think of such a thing. To leave your home would break your heart."

"Not if it was for your sake, my boy. There is only one other alternative, and I do not think you would like that."

"Tell it me!"

"You know if I had followed my own wishes, I should have lived in a far quieter style. The brougham, the riding horses and the footman are kept for Edith's pleasure. If I put down all these, Charley, I am almost certain she will leave me."

"But—"

"I do not think it would be unfair," said his mother, slowly. "Edith is as rich as I am, for years she has enjoyed all the luxuries of this house without contributing a penny to its expenses. I think I have a right now to consider my only son."

"She will be furious."

Mrs. Neville smiled.

"If my sudden economy drives her into setting up a home of her own, I shall not mind bearing a few angry speeches."

"I suppose," here Neville hesitated. "I suppose there never was anything between her and Geoffrey Meadows?"

"I never saw anything. Your father desired the match, and Lady Jane would have liked it; but I never thought Geoffrey attentive to Edith, and she is three years his senior. No, Charley, we mustn't count on Sir Geoffrey to free us of our family skeleton."

"A good substantial skeleton," said the young man, with a smile. "Mother, I pity you if you really carry out your plan."

Mrs. Neville, gentle and yielding though she was, never shirked a duty on which she had resolved. The very next day she spoke to Edith.

"My dear, I wanted to tell you I am going to make changes in the establishment. I am writing to my agent, asking him to find me a purchaser for the brougham and pair of horses. I propose dismissing the footman and coachman as soon as they can find other situations. I am going to decrease my expenses by every means in my power."

Edith stared at her.

"Are you mad?" she demanded, insolently. "No one will visit us; we shall be taboed!"

"Not by friends I value," said Mrs. Neville, quietly, "when they know my object. My son is a man grown now, Edith, and needs an income suited to his position. To allow Charles an adequate sum I shall retrench in every possible manner."

"And what am I to do?" cried Edith, hotly. "You are wronging me cruelly. By my father's will I can claim a home here."

"And you have had it," said her step-mother, gravely. "For ten years I have sacrificed everything to you, now I must think of my son. He may be marrying soon, and in any case I wish him to have an adequate income."

Edith Neville loved money dearly, but she loved importance and position even more.

"If I pay you a hundred—two hundred a year, will you let things go on as they are?"

"I cannot. This is my own house, Edith, and I cannot make any arrangement for you to share its expenses. I shall still live as a gentlewoman—as for instance, Mrs. Bertram of the Lawn, does—and if my home is not grand enough for you I must ask you to find another."

"Mrs. Bertram!" echoed Edith, scornfully. "Everyone knows she is a miser. She might live in the best style if she liked instead of shutting herself up with that namby-pamby companion."

"Are you speaking of Miss Leslie?"

"Yes. All Mrs. Bertram's companions have been more or less objectionable, but Gladys Leslie is the worst of the six."

"Oh, Edith, how differently we see things. I always think Mrs. Bertram has the greatest good fortune in meeting with such sweet lovable girls, and Miss Leslie is the very sweetest of them all."

"Here she comes!" said Edith, scornfully. "And as I don't care for hired society I will leave you to enjoy it alone."

Gladys Leslie had been two or three weeks at the Lawn, and was known by this time to all Mrs. Bertram's friends. There was but one verdict, that companion number six was a distinct success. A little grave and thoughtful, perhaps, for her years, but with the sweetest and most winning of the girls, who at different times had brightened up the widow's pleasant home.

Lady Mary Stone, who prided herself on her plain speaking, said that Gladys Leslie was "too pretty by half, and looked as if she had a history," but the greater part of Mrs. Bertram's acquaintance were delighted with the little companion.

She was a special favourite with Mrs. Neville, who often regretted her step-daughter had not been more like Gladys, and the gentle mistress of the Court received the girl very kindly in spite of the stormy scene she had just passed through.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, cheerfully. "I was thinking of coming to the Lawn this afternoon."

"You would not have found Mrs. Bertram at home. She is going to lunch at Meadow View. Lady Jane wrote to ask her last night."

"And you—aren't you invited too?"

"No," said Gladys, without a trace of irritation. "You see, Sir Geoffrey has only just come home after a long absence, and Mrs. Bertram is an old friend of his. It's natural they should not care for a stranger at their first meeting."

"Then you can't be in any hurry," urged Mrs. Neville, kindly. "Sit down and talk to me. Is Lady Jane very pleased at her son's return?"

"Delighted," said Gladys, "and so is Mrs. Bertram. I feel tired of his name."

Mrs. Neville smiled.

"You see, my dear, Geoffrey Meadows is rather an important person in these parts. Most of us remember him as a boy, and he is one of the most excellent young men I ever met. I shouldn't think he had ever given his mother an hour's anxiety."

"I hate excellent young men."

"My dear child! What makes you so vindictive this morning?"

"I don't know," and Gladys was smiling now, her illtemper vanished like a dream, "only ever since I have been here people have talked about nothing but Sir Geoffrey, and—I believe I have got a little tired; and then dear Mrs. Bertram will persist in calling him 'Poor Geoff,' and I can't for the life of me see why he is an object for pity."

Mrs. Neville smiled.

"I think Mrs. Bertram calls him 'Poor Geoff' because he is connected in her mind with her daughter."

Gladys opened her eyes.

"Do you mean they were engaged?"

"My dear! Alice died at fifteen, but she and Geoffrey Meadows had been 'little lovers' ever since they could speak plain. I have often fancied it is for her sake Geoff was never married."

Miss Leslie shrugged her shoulders.

"It must have been a very long time ago?"

"Over ten years, but Geoff has never cared for anyone else. It is the wish of his mother's heart that he should marry. He is poor, considering his rank, and a rich wife would be an immense advantage to him, but he does not seem to think so."

"I thought he was a rich man."

"He will be richer when his mother dies, and I fancy—both Lady Mary Stone and Mrs. Bertram will provide for him in their wills, but at present he is quite poor."

"Is that why he has been abroad?"

"I think so, combined with a love of travel. Geoff is a born rover."

"I am sure I shall hate him."

"My dear child! Why?"

But Gladys found the answer difficult.

"Everyone seems ready to bow down before him, and I don't think he deserves it. From all I can make out he must be a very disagreeable young man."

"He is the pet eligible of the neighbourhood. I don't suppose there is a girl for ten miles round who would refuse Geoffrey Meadows if he proposed to her."

"Then he had better make haste and throw the handkerchief," said Miss Leslie, indifferently.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BERTRAM went to Meadow View with very mingled feelings. She was fond of Geoffrey, and delighted to welcome him home, but she felt the very fast of being in Lady Jane's confidence respecting the "family master" might destroy the ease of her old friendship.

She soon found she need have no such fears. Geoffrey met her with all his old affection, a little older, a little graver, with just a trace of bitterness in some of his speeches, the master of Meadow View was yet in all essentials quite unchanged, a handsome, earnest-looking man, with a world of thought and intellect in his large grey eyes.

He and his mother seemed the best of friends. He was kindness itself to his sister, and his manners to the old tenants were simply charming, but Mrs. Bertram hated herself for noticing it. There was at times a trace of cynicism in his voice, and his smile was rarer than she remembered it.

Mrs. Bertram was persuaded to remain for

afternoon tea, and when she started to return to the Lawn the Baronet insisted on escorting her.

They went the length of the Park in silence, then Mrs. Bertram, who found it intensely difficult to start a conversation on indifferent subjects, said impulsively,—

"You can't think how glad I am to see you at home again, Geoff."

"I think it was best to come," the young man answered, slowly. "I suppose my mother has told you of my folly?"

"I should call the folly generosity, Geoff."

He kept silence for full five minutes, then he asked, sharply.

"Did the mother tell you her wish?"

"About a divorce—yes."

"Well?"

Mrs. Bertram looked at him impulsively, and for the first time noticed how worn and strained his face had grown, how old it looked for his nine and twenty years.

"I don't believe you will do it, Geoff—I can't fancy you doing it. I suppose the law, that is the American law, would set you free; but if you appealed to it and later on married again, you wouldn't feel safe. In your inmost heart you wouldn't believe it was right. Your second wife wouldn't seem to you really Lady Meadows—your children—"

The little lady stopped abruptly from sheer want of breath. Geoff took her hand and pressed it.

"I thought you would understand. My mother calls it Quixotic nonsense. You see I am the last male heir, and she finds it hard, but my heart echoes every word you say. If I had the divorce ever so, I couldn't marry while she was alive without feeling I had a sword always hanging over my head."

"Oh, Geoff! How could you do it?" asked his kind, old friend, "what made you?"

"It wasn't the fool of a doctor and what he said," answered Geoff, simply. "I don't think I'm idiot enough to take a wife because another man advised it, but, you see, she was all alone, and I was sorry for her. I had seen her with her brother you know, and it came to me all of a heap that it wouldn't be a bad thing to have anyone to love me as she loved him. That was what did it."

It dawned on Mrs. Bertram slowly, that Geoff's heart had been rather more engaged in the "family matter," than he knew or confessed.

"What was she like?" asked the widow, quietly. "Pretty—American girls are sometimes lovely I believe."

Geffo laughed rather bitterly.

"She hadn't any beauty to boast of, poor little thing. She was a wisp of a girl, with eyes that looked too big for her thin, white face, and close cropped hair, just like a charity child. She was awfully shy. The most scared-looking creature I ever saw, and her heart was just bound up in her brother."

"A gentleman?" queried Mrs. Bertram.

"Yes, in the rough; but I should say he had been a good sort of fellow. They had come to Columbia for his health, just the two of them. He told me they had not a relation in the world, and very few friends. Her lot seemed dreary enough, poor child, and I thought she would have been happier with me."

Mrs. Bertram looked puzzled.

"I have only heard your mother's version that you left your wife at an hotel, and returned to find her—gone. Had you really no clue to the motive of her flight?"

Geoff hesitated.

"Only a very slight one. I don't want my mother to know, but I can trust you."

"Yes."

"When I left Molly I came upon a friend of mine, acquaintance rather, we had made the voyage out together. He asked me if I was going home, and I not unnaturally mentioned my marriage. I know he made some unflattering comment about a western wild flower not being in the right place as Lady Meadows. I had never told Molly of my title."

I always dropped it on my travels. The walls in places like those wooden hotels are often very thin, sometimes mere canvas partitions. It has struck me since that my poor little girl might have overheard Graham's conversation, and have left me either because she fancied really, poor little soul, I regretted our marriage, or else that she resented my keeping back the fact of my having a title."

"And you never heard anything of her?" asked Mrs. Bertram.

"I found everything I had ever given her packed in a little parcel, and a note with the one word 'Good bye,' to her flight was evidently premeditated."

"Did she leave her wedding-ring?"

"She never had one! You can't find a jeweller's shop in the far west at a minute's notice. I married her with my signet ring. It was miles too big for her thin finger, but she took it with her."

"Geoff, you ought to try and find her."

Geoff shook himself somewhat after the fashion of a Newfoundland dog.

"What good would it do? If we were unsuited two years and more ago, when at least there was pity on one side to draw us together, we should be still more so now. You don't know how she has passed these years, probably as a farm-help or nurse. My mother would have been against her at the best, now she would simply scorn her."

"Your mother is not everything to you, Geoff."

"No," said the young man, resolutely, "or I should agree to her wish and try for a divorce; but you must remember my wife left me of her own free will. She knows my address, and that a letter would be forwarded where ever I might be. I don't want to be hard on her, but I think the first step towards reconciliation should come from her."

"I think you have spoilt your life, Geoff," said his old friend, sadly. "I don't see how any one can put things right."

"No," he said, with a curious smile, "they are tangled past redemption. Don't let us talk of my perplexities any more, tell me about yourself. Is it really true that you have had five companions since I saw you, and that matrimony has deprived you of them all?"

"It is perfectly true, also I have started a sixth."

"I call that tempting Providence," said Geoff, lightly. "I hope you picked out the plainest young woman you could find just in self defence."

"I engaged her without seeing her," confessed Mrs. Bertram, "and I was very much surprised at her appearance; but my choice has been most satisfactory. Gladys and I suit each other perfectly."

"A pretty name."

"And Gladys herself is something better than pretty," said Mrs. Bertram, warmly. "You must come in and be introduced."

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Your description is alarming, 'better than pretty,' I know exactly what that means, solid worth and heavy virtues."

"Come and see."

They went in together through the French windows of the drawing room, and then both paused involuntarily, for a girl sat at the piano singing, and Sir Geoffrey, who was a passionate lover of music, signed to his hostess to keep silent that they might not lose a sound.

Only a slight, black-robed figure with ruddy brown hair, coiled in thick plaits round her head. That was all Geoff could see at first, for her face was turned away, but the voice was the sweetest he had ever heard.

"How could I guess I should love thee to-day, Whom that day I held not dear; How could I tell I should love thee away, Whom I loved not when thou wast near."

The last note died away, and Gladys Leslie rose and came towards the window. As she caught sight of Mrs. Bertram and the stranger

she blushed crimson. The next moment she was paler than ever as her employer's voice said kindly,—

"I hope we have not startled you, Gladys. Geoff was so delighted with your singing he would not let me warn you we were listening. Now I must introduce you in proper form—Miss Leslie, Sir Geoffrey Meadows."

Sir Geoffrey's hand was ready, but Gladys only bowed with frigid dignity.

"That song is too sad for you," said Mrs. Bertram, when they were all seated.

"I like sad songs," returned Miss Leslie. "By the way I have a message for you, Mrs. Neville wants us to go there to tea to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted. — Geoff, have you seen the Nevilles yet?"

"Not yet," there was a faint hesitation about his reply. "My mother tells me Edith is Miss Neville still. I fancied she would have married long ago."

"She is too fastidious," said Mrs. Bertram.

"Or too proud!" put in Miss Leslie. "Sir Geoffrey, if you can introduce an acceptable suitor to Miss Neville you will earn the undying gratitude of her relations. Mrs. Bertram, it makes me positively cross to see how she rides rough-shod over her mother!"

"Mrs. Neville was always too yielding," said Geoff, thoughtfully. "Charley used to be a good sort of fellow."

"I fancy your sister, Grace, thinks he is still," put in Mrs. Bertram.

"Grace! why she is a mere baby. She can't be seventeen. You don't mean to tell me that child has set up a lover?"

"She has not set up one. Charles Neville has been in love with her ever since she could walk, but I don't think either of them have discovered it, which is a good thing, as Mr. Neville can't marry until Edith takes her departure."

Sir Geoffrey stayed a few minutes longer, and then Mrs. Bertram went up to dress for dinner, and Gladys retired to her own room.

"It is over," said the girl to herself, bitterly, "the meeting I have so dreaded and yet so longed for. All over! We have met, and I might have spared myself my trouble. Sir Geoffrey has forgotten me so utterly that he can greet me as a stranger. I wonder if he has also forgotten the circumstances of our acquaintance. Well," with a strange, mirthless little laugh, "it would have been decidedly embarrassing if he had recollected me, so I suppose I ought to be contented!"

"I am sure you are tired, Gladys," said Mrs. Bertram, when, dinner over, the two ladies settled themselves in the drawing-room for the rest of the evening. "You are looking quite pale, and your eyes are as heavy as though you had been crying!"

"I think I have," said the girl, with a strange, choked sort of sob. "Dear Mrs. Bertram, don't be kind to me. Say something sharp at once please, or I know I shall begin again!"

Marion Bertram crossed to the room to her companion's side and kissed her as she said gently,—

"My dear child, ever since you came to me I have felt sure there was something on your mind. Don't you think you would feel better if you confided your trouble to me?"

"I couldn't," and Gladys smiled wistfully; "but, please, please don't send me away! I don't often get foolish like this, and I will promise to be as cheerful as ever to-morrow, if you will only keep me."

"My dear child, I have no thought of sending you away," said Mrs. Bertram; "and I only ask your confidence because I want to help you. You don't surely think, Gladys, I love you less because you have troubles, or that I am so heartless as to expect you to smile perpetually, whatever your secret trials?"

"Miss Lestrade always said you would never keep me, because I was so 'mopy,'" explained Gladys; "and, indeed, I try to be

lively, but sometimes I can't help thinking of what I have lost."

"You mean your father?"

"Not only that. I had a very happy home once, and now I am alone in the world, with no one to love me, and I am so young, you see, and there may be years and years before death frees me; and sometimes I—I feel frightened."

"My dear girl, you must be ill to talk like this," cried Mrs. Bertram.

"No, I am quite well, only lonely."

"You may be lonely now," pursued her friend; "but you are so young, the happiness of your life is yet to come. Some day, Gladys, you will marry, and your husband's love will make you forget all you have lost."

Gladys shook her head.

"I shall never marry!"

"My dear, so many girls have said the same thing to me, and I have been to their weddings a few months later."

"But I am not like that; I mean what I say."

"So did they when they said it."

"I did not think you would laugh at me," said Gladys, in a very aggrieved tone.

"I did not mean to, dear," replied Mrs. Bertram; "only you are so very young to be so positive."

"I shall never marry!" repeated Miss Leslie. "I hate men, and I think they are all heartless. I mean to stay with you as long as ever you will keep me, and when you send me away I shall become a hospital nurse."

"I rather fancy the particular hospital you select may have to wait some time for your services," said Mrs. Bertram, with the utmost cheerfulness, "for I assure you, Gladys, I have not the least intention of parting with you so long as you can be persuaded to stay."

CHAPTER IV.

It was December. Christmas, the greatest festival of the year, was not far distant, and Mrs. Bertram sat in her pretty boudoir, with an unusual cloud on her kindly face. To quote a homely expression, everything had "gone wrong" during the last few months. The mistress of the Lawn felt that all around her was "askew," and yet she had not the faintest idea how to put things right.

She knew that they were drifting towards a painful crisis. That some startling *dénouement* must soon arrive, and yet, for the life of her, she did not know what to do to avert it. She could not have told what she hoped or what she feared, she was only conscious the threads of life about her were getting every day more entangled, and that she was utterly powerless to unravel them.

To begin with, there was Gladys Leslie. After four months of daily intercourse, Mrs. Bertram loved her companion as she had never loved any other girl since her daughter's death. Gladys seemed almost a part of herself. She would have sacrificed health, strength and money to ensure the child's happiness, and yet she could see plainly Gladys was not happy. The wistfulness of her face increased, her smile grew rarer, she uttered no complaint, she murmured no reproach, and yet Mrs. Bertram's loving eyes saw perfectly that she was the victim of a secret sorrow, all the keener, perhaps, because she buried it in her own heart.

As though Gladys was not enough, the good-natured widow was very anxious about Geoffrey Meadows. He was still at Meadow View.

He had taken up all the duties of his position, and won praise from rich and poor as a generous landlord, a just steward of the wealth entrusted to him.

He never shirked an engagement, he went into society and met his friends whenever duty was required of him; but his smile

grew rarer, he was as a man enshadowed by some deep trouble.

After that first day he never mentioned his lost wife to Mrs. Bertram. Whenever he was alone with her he kept the conversation practically to the most indifferent subjects, but, all the same, her quick woman's wit had guessed his secret—the heart poor Molly Sykes had never touched was lost to its owner beyond recall.

Sir Geoffrey Meadows, baronet, the proudest man in the county, was in love with the poor little companion, and Mrs. Bertram mourned over him for a twofold reason. First, the existence of his lost wife must for ever stand between him and other ties; secondly, had he been free to propose to her, Gladys would have rejected him with scorn.

From the first day of their meeting, she had treated Geoff with marked coldness. It was not only that, as she had once said, she did not believe in men in general, but she had, besides, a special dislike for this particular member of the sex.

To turn from this very provoking pair of young people to other friends Mrs. Bertram could not congratulate herself. Edith Neville had refused to take the very plain hint conveyed by her stepmother's reticements. She was still at the Count, and though she grumbled from morning to night over the changes there she gave no sign of seeking another home. Charley, good fellow that he was, had a worn troubled look, and of late a shade had dimmed the brightness of Grace's blue eyes.

"You take things too much to heart," Lady Mary had told Mrs. Bertram only the day before, "all these people are very foolish;" (this was *adpropos* of the Neville family, even the poor old maid had not divined the other's cause for anxiety), "but after all it is their own affair, and no concern of ours."

But Mrs. Bertram could not throw off cares so lightly, and to-day had brought her an extra grievance. She had received a letter from Mrs. Lestrade proffering a short visit to the Lawn during the month she was to spend in England. After a welcome, Mrs. Bertram had hastened to tell the good news to Gladys, when, instead of the sympathy she had expected, Miss Leslie burst into tears and ran out of the room.

It was enough to puzzle her. If Gladys liked anyone she had certainly seemed to like the pretty young matron to whom she owed her present situation. She had spoken of Mrs. Lestrade in the warmest terms of gratitude and admiration. She had never wearied of hearing the story of her romantic courtship, and had frankly declared his wife was a great deal too good for the rather stolid doctor, and yet at the news of her friend's approaching visit she had simply burst into tears.

"There must be a secret somewhere," thought poor Mrs. Bertram, almost in despair, "I am quite certain Gladys has some terrible trouble that she is hiding from me, perhaps Katy is in her confidence, and the poor child dreads meeting her because it will revive her grief."

Mrs. Bertram had got so far in her reflections, when Jones announced, "Sir Geoffrey Meadows," who was such a frequent visitor as never to be denied, and always to have the entry of her boudoir. He looked pale and stern, but there was a less haggard expression about his mouth, than she had seen there of late, and the felt almost before he spoke, that his tidings, whatever they might be were not sad ones.

"I want to tell you something," began Geoff, bluntly. "I dare say you will despise me utterly, but I am going to America."

"I think it is the wisest thing you could possibly do," she answered, kindly, "believe me, Geoff, half and half measures don't answer. A man must be one thing or the other. He can't be happy posing as a bachelor,

when all the while, he knows he has a living wife."

"You don't understand," said Geoff at once, "that is what I want to find out. Is my wife alive or dead. I told you once I would never wrong her. I tell you so again. If Molly is alive I will never seek to be free from those hateful letters, though the American law would grant me a divorce; I shall never seek for one; but I can't bear suspense. I must know whether my wife is alive or dead, and I am going to America to find out."

"And then—" she said the young man, calmly, but how she waited for his reply, "you will return?"

"If I find Molly, I shall never return with her," he answered, firmly, "she may prefer to remain in her native land, and, for good or ill, I shall be true to my marriage vows and cast in my lot with hers."

"Heaven bless you, Geoff! I always knew your heart was in the right place!"

"It isn't," he answered, quietly, "and you mustn't praise me. I told you you would despise me, and I deserve you scorn, I am going to America, not because I want my wife, not out of pity for her loneliness, but because," and his voice almost broke, and the last words, came in short painful jerks, "because I love another woman more than life itself, and I dare not stay near her for fear I should forget everything and tell her so."

"You mean my Gladys?"

"Ay, I mean Gladys. I must be a fool, makin' I, bound hand and foot as I am, to fall in love knowing it was useless above all to fall in love with a girl who has never given me a friendly word?"

"Geoff, I don't know if it will make things easier for you to hear it, but in any case Gladys could never have been yours. She has some heavy sorrow whose nature I cannot even guess at, but which for all time will keep her unwedded."

Geoff shook his head.

"I daresay I haven't the ghost of a chance, but all the same I must know the truth, must discover whether I am—bound or free."

"And if free you will return to Gladys?"

"Ay, and in spite of all you have told me I believe I shall win her. I know she seems to scorn me utterly, but remember I have never been able to tell her of my feelings. My love for her is so intense and strong I feel that in time it must win a return."

"And when shall you go?"

"Not till January. If it rested with myself I should start to-morrow, but Gracie and Charles Neville have at last found out their own hearts, and as I stand in her father's place I have promised to give the child to her bridegroom on New Year's Day."

"Three weeks time. Geoff, are you in earnest? Why, they were not engaged last week!"

"Their engagement is just two days old. He would have spoken sooner, only he seems to have felt afraid his sister's presence at the Court would spoil his wife's happiness. Aunt Mary has offered them her house for two years while she goes on a long foreign tour. Mrs. Neville and Charles decided they could migrate there and close the Court which, you see, releases them from Edith's thralldom. I fancy the moment this was settled Charles proposed to Grace."

"I expect your aunt planned the foreign tour on purpose."

"To tell you the truth, I am quite sure of it. I expect the moment Edith has started an establishment of her own Aunt Mary will find foreign parts don't agree with her, and come back to the Cottage when Mrs. Neville and the turtle doves will return to the Court."

"I saw Lady Mary yesterday, and she never said a word to me."

"No, she never boasts of her own good deeds; on the contrary, she seems rather ashamed of them."

"I can't tell you how glad I am. I always thought Gracie and Charles Neville just made

for each other, but Edith seemed a hopeless obstacle."

"She is not best pleased."

"Who broke the news to her?"

"By unanimous consent the duty was entrusted to me. I didn't like the task, and only undertook it because I thought she would bully me rather less than anyone else. I can assure you I found the job remarkably unpleasant."

"Did she propose to you?" asked Mrs. Bertram, wickedly. "I believe she is capable of it."

"No, she didn't. She gave me a long lecture on the evil of unequal marriages, and finally warned me that your companion was an artful, unprincipled girl, whose father had committed forgery."

"I don't believe it."

"Neither did I. It seems the fair Edith has been at some trouble to investigate Miss Leslie's past. Years ago she was a pupil at the Misses Lestrange's school, and being at Brighton last week she called on her old preceptor and gave them (she says) a very full account of their protégée."

"Poor Gladys! I always felt she was no favourite with Edith Neville."

"Miss Neville evidently thought what she told me was quite enough to disenchanted any man. She little guessed but for that awful barrier between us it would have made me only the more anxious to claim Gladys as my own."

"What did she tell you, Geoff?"

Sir Geoffrey raised her eyebrows.

"Only that Miss Lestrange had received Gladys Leslie as a pupil teacher entirely out of charity. That her father died in prison, and her mother had been an actress. The schoolmistress admitted she was clever, but did not believe her health would stand studying for examinations. Miss Lestrange evidently looks on you as a good Samaritan, who has burdened himself with a most ungenial companion out of pure philanthropy."

"The idea. Why Gladys is the pleasantest inmate I wish to have."

"Miss Lestrange declared she was consumptive, and doubted if she could live two years. I think that was the only part which hurt me. I could not bear to think of such a doom hanging over that lovely girl."

"Geoff, Gladys is no more consumptive than you are! I believe Edith Neville invented the whole story."

"I don't!" he said, gravely. "She may have exaggerated it, but knowing your intimacy with young Mrs. Lestrange she wouldn't dare to impose on us a purely fictitious story."

Gladys herself came in to Mrs. Bertram's boudoir not ten minutes after Geoff had left it, and a most wonderful thing had happened. Her eyes were dry and her face was wreathed in smiles. From a perfect Niobe she had suddenly become radiant.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Bertram, much bewildered, "you can't think how glad I am to see you your own bright self again."

"You are very good to put up with me," replied Gladys. "You spoil me so terribly that I have actually come to ask you a favour. Do please say yes."

"Of course I will say 'yes,' if it is in my power. I hope it is not to let you leave me, Gladys," she added, anxiously.

"Oh, no! It is something ever so much simpler; but first I want to ask you something. Did you think just now I didn't want to see Mrs. Lestrange? And haven't you been setting me down as the most ungrateful little mix ever since?"

"No. I fancied there were some sad associations connected with Katy that made you regret her coming. I never thought you ungrateful."

"Well," and Gladys gave her friend a perfectly bewitching little smile, "I want to see Mrs. Lestrange tremendously, and I shall be perfectly delighted at her visit if—if you will grant me my favour."

"Tell me what it is, I don't think you need doubt my answer."

"I want to go and meet her all by myself," said Gladys, frankly. "Of course, I know she would much rather see you, and you have a much better claim to go and welcome her, but—"

"You shall certainly go, Gladys," said Mrs. Bertram; "and I believe I can guess your reason for wishing to do so."

"That is impossible!"

"My dear, I have never said a word to you of your past, but Miss Neville has been visiting at Brighton. She was at Miss Lestrange's school there long ago, and she went to see her."

"And Miss Lestrange told her all about me. Wasn't she shocked?"

"At any rate, I am not shocked," said Mrs. Bertram. "It only made me love you more. I think I understand. Katy knows your troubles, and you want to speak to her about them."

"I want to see her alone for just ten minutes," answered Gladys. "Oh! Mrs. Bertram, don't think me wicked!"

"You shall have your favour, Gladys, and I don't think you at all wicked. Now, I believe I can improve on your plan, Katy has fixed next Monday for her visit, Lady Jane has asked me to lunch at Meadow View in honour of Grace's engagement. I will accept the invitation, and it will be five o'clock before I get home, so you and Katy will have plenty of time alone together."

CHAPTER V.

MONDAY afternoon, and in Mrs. Bertram's boudoir sat two girls, their low chairs drawn close to the blazing fire. Both had once been inmates of that pleasant home. Both had filled the same position there, for one was Katy Lestrange and the other Gladys Leslie.

The very picture of a happy young matron was the doctor's pretty wife, and the way she held Miss Leslie's hand in hers and stroked it had something almost motherly in its tenderness.

"I am so glad I have told you," Gladys was saying, in her sweet, sad voice. "Dear Mrs. Lestrange, there have been times lately when my secret almost drove me mad. I knew you hadn't seen much of me, and that I had in a sort of way deceived you, yet I felt you would try to help me!"

"I will help you gladly, dearie; but I knew part of your story before."

"Who could have told you?"

"The real Gladys Leslie. When she was settled at Bournemouth with her sister in the happy home your kindness provided the secret seemed to weigh upon her mind, and she wrote to me."

"What did she say?"

"Only that she had felt from the first she was not strong enough for Mrs. Bertram's situation. That her chest was too weak for reading aloud or singing, and she felt so ill that she longed to spend the little time that remained to her with her sister."

"Poor little thing!" and the tears of the false Gladys fell thick and fast.

"She told me too, dear, of the kindness and generosity of Miss Sykes, the parlour boarder I had met at my sister-in-law's, and how that young lady had insisted on sending her to Bournemouth with her sister, and paying all the expenses."

"Don't," came from the other girl, sadly. "Poor Gladys was so grateful she never guessed I did it for my own selfish ends!"

Miss Lestrange went on,—

"She told me Miss Sykes had undertaken to go to Herfordshire, and explain everything to Mrs. Bertram; that Miss Sykes was leaving Brighton for good, and so would be exposed to no unpleasantness from my sister-in-law for her part in the transaction. In fact, Molly, it might all have seemed natura

enough but for one thing, instead of the reproachful letter I expected from dear Mrs. Bertram, full of lamentations that Miss Leslie had failed her at the eleventh hour, I received a rapturous thanksgiving for having provided her with such a charming companion as Gladys Leslie. I put two and two together, Molly, and speedily decided that for some reason or other Miss Sykes was masquerading at Meadow View under the disguise of a humble companion!"

"But you never guessed why."

"I am not a magician, Molly. I thought you were tired of the homage paid to your wealth, and wanted to trust to your beauty for a while, instead."

The girl who was Lady Meadows, but had never borne that title, looked up with a faint flush.

"I have told you of my marriage, but I kept back something—I loved my husband passionately, the thought of belonging to Geoff almost consoled me for my brother's death. You see, Mrs. Lestrade I knew my husband had no idea of my fortune, and that Jack's death would make me one of the richest women in America. I thought he loved me for myself alone, and then, when I heard him tell some man he had married me out of pity, I felt almost mad, and made up my mind I would run away and leave him free. I just went back to California, and Jack's lawyer wound up the business, and shipped my fortune in English securities to Liverpool, and when I got there I remembered Miss Lestrade, and that mother had been her pupil long, long ago. I found out her address, and I went down to see her, and told her I was of age, and had more money than I knew what to do with, and would pay any sum she liked if only she would teach me English ways."

"I know," said Katy, softly, "and I do believe Priscilla, besides her delight in your wealth, loved you for your own sake."

"Perhaps she did," admitted Molly, "but can't you understand when I heard of Mrs. Bertram wanting a companion how I longed to go to Meadow View myself."

"And now—"

"Well?" the unacknowledged wife blushed rosy red. "Well, to confess the truth dear, I don't know exactly what to do next."

"I suppose you have seen—your husband?" asked Mrs. Lestrade.

"Don't call him that. I have seen Sir Geoffrey dozens of times. He is devoted to Mrs. Bertram, and comes nearly every day."

"Are you sure he comes to see Mrs. Bertram— isn't it yourself?"

"Of course not," said Lady Meadows, firmly, "he never forgets he is married."

"And he has no suspicions?"

"Not the least in the world! Oh, how he must have hated me to see me every day and not remember!"

"You have altered very much."

"A man ought to know his own wife under any circumstances."

"Perhaps," agreed Katy cheerfully, "but may it please your ladyship, we will leave Sir Geoffrey's sins, both of omission and commission, alone for the present. I have one or two questions to ask you, and Mrs. Bertram may be back any minute now."

"Well?"

"In the first place—what am I to call you? In the second how long is this charming little comedy to go on? In the third, what do you mean to do next?"

"Call me Gladys."

"I like Molly much better, but—the other questions seem more important."

"You are very unkind to me," and the girl was very nearly crying. "Haven't I told you everything? Haven't I confessed all my horrible secret? Well, of course, I expected you would help me."

"And I will help you, deary. Only," and in spite of her sympathy, Mrs. Lestrade could not repress a smile, "the first step

towards helping you is to find out your own wishes."

"As how—"

"Well, do you want Sir Geoffrey to go on in his ignorance, or would you like it gently broken to him that you are the runaway wife he lost in America two years ago?"

"I think he ought to know that I am alive."

"Undoubtedly!"

"But I wouldn't have him think I wanted to be acknowledged as Lady Meadows for the whole world!"

"Precisely, you wish Sir Geoffrey to learn that his wife is passing under the alias of Gladys Leslie, but at the same time to be assured the wilful young woman has no desire to claim her rightful title."

"Yes!"

"I don't know much about law," said Mrs. Lestrade, "but I always fancied a husband could claim his wife's society?"

"I shouldn't allow it."

"Oh! Then I am to conclude the love you spoke of feeling for Sir Geoffrey, has quite vanished?"

Gladys turned away her head, the tears were in her eyes.

"You are very unkind to me. I believe you know exactly what I mean. I do care for my husband, but unless I know he loves me, I will never be more to him than I am now."

When Mrs. Bertram returned she thought she had never seen her present companion in better spirits, nor her late one more absent-minded. Pretty Mrs. Lestrade really seemed almost lost in a reverie. Her answers were long in coming and often quite wide of the point; but her preoccupation was not from lack of affection, for when Gladys had left them alone Katy told her kind old friend again and again how glad she was to be once more at the Lawn.

"My husband is awfully good to me, and I am the happiest wife in Pont aux Dames, but I can never forget your kindness, and it makes me feel almost like a girl again to be here."

Mrs. Bertram kissed her warmly.

"And I am glad to have you. Is it not strange, Katy, that of my companions five should have left me to be married, and the sixth should entertain the most rooted aversion to love and lovers. I have promised to ask no questions, but I hope poor little Gladys has told you her troubles. It is easy to see, poor child! she has some painful secret to cloud her life."

"She has told me everything. It is a terrible secret, but I think all will come right in the end."

"I suppose it was a lover, and he deserted her when he discovered the truth about her father."

"Please don't ask me! I can only tell you the child was very much in love before ever she went to Brighton, and that I don't despair of the man she cared for learning to value her properly even now. Of one thing I am certain, she will marry no one else, so dear Mrs. Bertram you mustn't go match-making for your sixth companion."

"Katy! you know perfectly I never was a matchmaker. If my young friends will marry I can't help it."

"Have there been any more weddings at Meadow View lately?" inquired Mrs. Lestrade; "surely some of the Meadows must have gone off."

"Grace is engaged to Charles Neville."

"One knew it must come to that just by seeing them once. By the way, Sir Geoffrey has come home, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"With a bride?"

"No, poor fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Bertram, sympathetically; "and he has not much chance of bringing a bride to Meadow View. I can't explain it to you, Katy; it is quite a family matter. But Sir Geoffrey is unable to marry."

"Doesn't he want to?" asked Katy, wickedly. "Knowing your little ways, you dear old lady, I made sure you would have introduced him to Gladys."

Mrs. Bertram sighed.

"Of course I introduced them, and Geoff comes here most days; but Gladys won't hear of love-making, and he, poor fellow, is not free to make it."

Katy looked at her old friend gravely.

"I know an American girl, who told me Sir Geoffrey was married already," she said, slowly.

"Good gracious! Poor fellow! You don't mean the news of his misfortune is getting about?"

"My friend didn't seem to think it exactly a misfortune. She was a Miss Sykes, a pupil at my sister-in-law's school. She and Gladys Leslie were great chums."

"Then, depend upon it, she told Gladys her story, and that is why my favourite is always so desperately cold to Geoff."

"What story?"

"Geoffrey did marry in America, and his wife was a Miss Sykes—very likely sister of the girl you know."

"Molly Sykes has no sister."

"Molly! Then it must be herself. Oh! Katy, I must tell Geoff. He is actually thinking of going to America to try and find his wife."

"He has been a long time making up his mind."

"Don't laugh at him, my dear. Poor fellow! he has sore need of pity. He is over head and ears in love with Gladys, and he is bound hard and fast to another woman."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT on earth can the woman want with me?"

This was Sir Geoffrey's reflection a few days later, when he laid down a dainty little note, in which Mrs. Lestrade told him she was leaving the Lawn the next day, and should be very pleased if he would call on her that afternoon, as she much wished to speak to him on a family matter.

"She's a nice little thing, and I like her very much because she is such a friend of Gladys, but what 'family matter' can she want to discuss with me?"

But at three o'clock he presented himself at the Lawn, to be told, by Jones, that Mrs. Bertram was out driving, and Miss Leslie lying down with a headache, but he would find Mrs. Lestrade in the drawing-room.

She greeted him very simply. Any doubts he might have had fled, and he felt that, however mistaken she might be, Mrs. Lestrade honestly believed her business of importance to him.

"Sir Geoffrey," she said, frankly, when the first greetings were over, "I fear you thought my note impertinent, but, indeed, I only wished to serve you. I heard incidentally you were going to America next month. Will you forgive my seeming rudeness and tell me if the report is true?"

"There is no rudeness in the question," he replied, pleasantly. "I have made no secret of my intentions. Every man and woman in the place probably knows that I start for the new world directly after my sister's wedding."

"I believe—oh! pray forgive me—I know the object of your journey. To save you a long and fruitless quest, I have risked your thinking me intrusive. I asked you to come here that I might tell you Miss Sykes is in England. She was at my sister-in-law's school for two years, and only left Brighton last August."

Sir Geoffrey started.

"Alive and in England!"

"You will forgive me," whispered Katy; "but it seemed wrong to let you go on a bootless quest. Do not think your wife has taken the whole world into her confidence. Only

two people know what I have told you, myself and Gladys Leslie."

"Miss Leslie! Do you mean that she knows—that I am married?"

"She and your wife were at Brighton together. They were perfectly inseparable. You may depend upon it, Sir Geoffrey, whatever one knew she told the other. If you want your wife's address it is of Gladys Leslie you must seek it."

Sir Geoffrey buried his face in his hands. His fate seemed almost too hard. For a moment he could not speak. Katy Lestrange herself deeply moved, glided from the room, whispering—

"I will send her to you."

Another moment and Gladys came in, but what a changed and altered Gladys. Her mocking laugh, her gay repartees were all gone. In her place stood a sweet-faced girl, whose eyes—was it possible—met his own with loving trust, and yet she knew his secret. His unloved wife was her dearest friend.

"Gladys," he began, abruptly, and then he paused, something in her face seemed to prevent him from going on.

"Stop," she said, gently, her brown eyes fixed on the floor. "I must tell you something first. I have deceived Mrs. Bertram and every one here, for I am not Gladys Leslie. She, poor girl! is dying of consumption at Bournemouth. We were close friends, and she lent me all she had, her name, because I wanted to come to Meadow View, and—and I did not know what to call myself!"

"You did not know?" much bewildered.

"No," and now she looked up at him with a strange, sweet smile. "Everyone has always called me Molly Sykes, but—"

The sentence was never finished, for like a flash of lightning the truth dawned on Sir Geoffrey, and in another moment his wife was in his arms!

Lady Jane and her unmarried daughters retired to the Dower House, Gracie and her husband reign at the Court, for Edith Neville has at last found a partner for life, and, marrying a French count, left her family to the peaceful enjoyment of their home where gentle Mrs. Neville develops into the most darling of grandmothers.

Everyone knows that Sir Geoffrey met his wife in the far West, and married her before he knew she was an American heiress. Everyone knows, too, that a misunderstanding parted them, and they were only restored to each more than two years after their wedding-day.

But Geoffrey and his Gladys (he never called her by any other name) never minded their friends and neighbours being aware of the clouds of their early married life, for they know quite well that everyone regards them now as the happiest couple of their acquaintance.

"Yes," Lady Jane is wont to observe, with a satisfied smile, "my boy married a great heiress, and he and his wife are simply devoted to each other, there was a slight misunderstanding at first which parted them for more than two years, but that is all over and forgotten now. It was only a 'FAMILY MATTER!'"

[THE END.]

The trial of the pyx is an interesting annual ceremony that in one form or another has occurred for centuries in England. The pyx is a box in which certain numbers of coins of every denomination are placed after each day's work in the Royal Mint for a year. The Goldsmiths' Company has constituted the jury since its institution several hundred years ago. When the jury open the pyx they weigh the coins in bulk, and, in a certain number of cases, separately, testing them also with fire and chemicals, so that there can be left no trace of doubt of the true value of British and British-made coinage.

NEARLY LOST.

—o—

MARION BLOUNT, in her superb blonde beauty, turned and surveyed her unconscious rival from head to foot, and this was what she saw: A slight figure sitting in the window recess, clothed in some dull, grey stuff. A plain face, you would have said, just as Miss Blount did. Brown hair, in childish curls, falling behind her ears; brown eyes, or grey, she could scarcely tell which, listless, unattractive; irregular features, which would not call forth a second glance; complexion fair, but lacking brilliancy and colour; in figure below the medium height.

Just now sitting so listlessly, gazing out over the sea, clothed in that dull, grey stuff, that seemed to cast a still deadlier pallor over her face, Hilda Moss seemed far from beautiful, or even interesting.

Marion turned from the unconscious figure, and passed on to her room, she went straight to the large mirror, and paused before it.

"And that plain, dull, awkward thing your rival!" she said to the magnificent reflection.

And the beautiful woman in the mirror curved her proud neck and smiled defiantly in return.

She was a striking contrast to Hilda. Tall, exquisitely formed, and queenly in carriage; deep, luminous blue eyes, fringed with golden lashes; features of perfect regularity; and bright, yellow hair, arranged in the height of fashion. Arrayed in light blue silk, elaborately trimmed, her sea-shell complexion rivaled the lily and rose, and her wonderful beauty shone at its height.

In all the crowd at the seaside that season, there were none who disputed Miss Blount's claim to belle and star. Lesser lights there were in plenty, but all acknowledged her as reigning queen.

Brilliant, indeed, were her conquests, yet down in the depths of that heart, they all were as nothing compared with one tender glance from Cecil Carter's dark eyes—Cecil Carter, handsome as a Greek statue, brilliant, rich, and the much-longed-for, but unattainable catch of the season, whom mamma's angled for and girls smiled upon, yet who had at last entered the list of Miss Blount's admirers.

In spite of her triumph, Marion Blount was fighting with the demon of unrest. Two nights before, sitting at her open window, she had caught a floating scrap of gossip from below.

Two men walked under her window, and one was saying,—

"If Hilda Moss comes next week, I fancy we shall see lively times. Carter was clean gone with her two years ago, and has never looked at a woman since, till this season. I hear she's coming, and if so, I shall watch the result with lively interest."

"Yes, so shall I," laughed the other voice. "For, fascinating as Queen Marion is, I never saw the woman that could hold her own with Hilda."

The men passed in out of hearing, and Marion sat hours at the window thinking of this unknown rival.

Never in her life had Miss Blount's mind dwelt upon any other woman as it dwelt upon this Hilda Moss—this formidable stranger. Two long days of waiting for her rival, and then coming from a drive with Lord Lorton, she saw him lift his hat, and smile to a figure in the window recess, and before she could follow his glance they shot by.

But his lordship turned to her with his blonde face slightly flushed, and asked,—

"Do you know—that is, have you ever met Miss Moss?"

Miss Blount's heart leaped, but she answered, quietly,—

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Ah, I see she has arrived. I did not know she had yet come. She is a belle, like yourself. She suits all."

Passing up to her room, Marion paused on the landing, where, seeing, but unseen, she could command a view of her rival.

You know what she saw; and passing judgment in her own mind, she committed that fatal error—undervaluing a rival.

She made an exquisite toilet that evening, and was almost the last to enter the ball-room. Leaning upon the arm of her portly uncle, she entered with her heart throbbing high and her cheeks glowing with excitement. In all the assemblage there was no peer to her beauty.

The musicians struck into a glorious waltz just after she was seated, and somebody came to claim her, but not before she had seen Lord Lorton whirl by on the arm of Hilda Moss. She was dressed in black grenadine, high in the neck and close at the wrists, with frills of foamy lace. Her hair was thrown back from the full, white forehead, and hung from the silver-gemmed long comb, in heavy curls, scarcely reaching her shoulders. She was pale and devoid of bloom as when she sat in the window-recess; but her brown eyes, that Miss Blount had deemed "stupid and sleepy," were as luminous as stars.

"The only decent features in her face!" Marion said, mentally, as she gave her, that wide, sweeping glance that women of the world understand so well how to bestow.

Cecil Carter came in just as the last strains of the waltz died out in sobs. He came over to Marion to claim her for the promised quadrille. The sets were forming, and he led her to their place just as Fred Innes the young millionaire led Miss Hilda Moss opposite.

Cecil's eyes met for one moment, and they bowed; and Marion, who took in the expression of both faces at one careless glance, saw surprise, and something like embarrassment—she could give it no other name—in his eyes, while her face was passive and "perfectly stolid," as Miss Blount chose to term it.

She had never been so brilliant, or Cecil so attentive, as on that evening. All her old admirers flocked about her save Lord Lorton, who hovered about Miss Moss.

"It is very gallant of him!" Marion said, mentally. "for the poor girl would be quite neglected but for him!"

Yet, in her heart, she felt that Lorton was insane enough to really admire "the poor little girl," who left early, and the peer lingered for a moment after her departure.

Once during the evening Miss Blount said carelessly to Cecil Carter,—

"Our new arrival is an acquaintance of yours, is she not?" and he had answered quite as carelessly: "I met her at the seaside two years ago."

That night, after she had retired, her aunt came into her room for a few moments' chat over the dance.

She was a tall, grey-eyed woman this Mrs. Blount—fashionable, keen-witted, and, had she been of the sterner sex, would have been a capital lawyer.

"Marion," she said, going straight to the point at once, "you want to be on your guard against that girl in black. Who is she?"

Marion opened her blue eyes to their widest extent.

"Oh, aunt! guard against that little dowdy! Why, I won't condescend to think of her as a rival. She is actually homely. What do you mean?"

Aunt Eleanor's eyes grew a size smaller.

"She is anything but a dowdy, and I warn you to beware of her. If you have any game you wish to secure, do it speedily, for there is danger ahead. What is the girl's name?"

"Hilda Moss, I think they call her."

"Hem! Yes, an odd name, like the possessors! But remember what I say, for I know more of the world than you do. Go to sleep now, and be fresh for to-morrow. Wear your

pearl-coloured silk, and crimp your front hair at dinner."

In crimped and pearl-coloured silk, Miss Blount was resplendent that afternoon out on the crowded veranda. It was warm, very warm, and the ladies were languid and interesting. Their toilettes were elaborate, however, for they were never neglected.

But suddenly in their midst came a white vision. Miss Moss, arrayed in fleecy clouds of white, with knots and bows, and sashes of rose-coloured ribbons, her hair in a thousand tiny coils, held back from the white forehead by bands of rose-coloured ribbons, her cheeks crimson, her red mouth smiling, her dark eyes wide and sparkling.

How cool and radiant she looked in that languid, overdressed company. Every eye followed her. Every ear listened to her witty sallies and her gay bursts of laughter. She electrified—she startled all. These sudden transformations, these daring oddities and extremes in dress and manner—herself lay all Miss Moss's fascinations, her subtle witcheries. To-day this "poor little girl," that Miss Blount had called "dowdy" and "stupid," and "unattractive," was the life and light of the company.

Lord Lorton left Marion's side at one glance of Hilda's dark alluring eyes, and half the men upon the veranda hovered near her. But Cecil Carter remained in his seat at Marion's side, gallantly welding the fan or talking pleasing nonsense.

"He never once looked at Hilda," Miss Blount said to her aunt that night, in the privacy of their room.

But that lady answered, quizzily.—

"If you want Cecil Carter, I have only this to say, be expeditious, and do not delay with him at all. There is no safety while that girl stays."

Marion laughed lightly, but Aunt Eleanor had seen Cecil's face flush from brow to chin that afternoon when Hilda's hand had accidentally touched his.

Cecil and Marion rode out together the following day, and her aunt whispered, as her niece descended,—

"Give him all possible encouragement to-day."

In her heart Marion had determined that he should propose during that ride. She had never looked more beautiful than just then in her graceful black habit and hat. Cecil Carter's dark eyes rested upon her in pleased admiration, and as they neared the beach, something in his face made her heart tremble, and he leaned nearer and took her hand.

"It is coming," she thought, but just then a blue scarf fluttered in the breeze and fell at his horse's feet, which reared and plunged aside, and just then Hilda Moss, clad in deep blue, her eyes mournful and appealing, her mouth like a grieved child, swung down from her perch and secured her scarf. She had not seen the equestrians until the rearing of the horses attracted her attention.

The ride was continued, but Cecil did not propose that day.

There was a brilliant ball that evening, and Hilda Moss was the belle of the occasion.

She had quietly taken the sceptre Miss Blount had so long held, and occupied her throne, while that lady stepped below her.

Yet Miss Blount bore her rival's triumphs right royally. For Cecil lingered still at her side, and his manner to Miss Moss, as to all ladies save Marion, bespoke polite indifference.

So the days passed on; Hilda's subtle changes in mood and manner fascinating, bewildering and entralling scores of hearts, but not Cecil Carter's. Only Aunt Eleanor's keen grey eyes saw the flush upon his face, and the glow of his eye, at the sweep of Hilda's robe, or the accidental touch of her hand.

"He loves her," she said, mentally, "and in the end she will win him over. Poor Marion!"

But poor Marion was very happy, for she

did not see through her aunt's eyes; and Cecil's attentions were proof of his love.

Down upon the beach one morning Miss Blount sought out her favourite resort, a secluded nook in a mossy rock. Here she settled herself to read and think, but instead quietly fell asleep. Voices below awoke her—one of which she recognised as that of Cecil Carter. He was speaking low but passionately, and every word reached her ear.

"I cannot bear this killing coldness—I can not act my part any longer; and you know there is no medium place for you and me, Hilda. It is love in its fullest, completest form, or icy coldness. We cannot meet upon any half-way ground. I have tried not to care for you, have tried to be indifferent; but I love you now as I have loved you for two years. Forget that silly quarrel, dear, as I would forget it, and let us once again be friends—lovers."

Cecil Carter and Marion Blount both waited breathlessly for Hilda's answer. It came.

"I leave for Germany six weeks from to-day, as Lord Lorton's wife."

"Great Heaven! How—" he began, so fiercely that Marion shivered in her hiding-place, but Hilda's calm tones interrupted.

"Hear me through," she said, quietly. "I came here for the sole purpose of meeting you. Long ago I repented that foolish quarrel that parted us. But you did not seek me for a reconciliation, and so I sought you. A humiliating confession, but a true one. I thought we could both forgive and forget, renew old ties, and be happy again. I have loved you all this time—I love you now. But I found you cold, reserved, and frigid, to all but one. I have hoped against hope, that you would come to me with just one word, that at last all would be well. I think you cannot marvel that I finally relinquished my hope. Had you come one day sooner, my answer would have been different. As it is, I am Lord Lorton's promised wife, and I have only one word more to say—good-bye!"

He was a man of honour, and he did not plead with her to break her promise. But he took her in his arms and kissed her lips just once, and then the two went their separate ways. And the angels in heaven never looked down upon three more desolate, miserable souls than those three upon the beach.

Miss Blount was not visible the remainder of that day. She had a severe headache, and her aunt explained, and would not be down. Cecil Carter sent up a message that she heard with a heart full of contending emotion.

"Miss Blount must come down, for I shall leave early in the morning, and should regret to go with no word of farewell."

So Marion went down, and this was what Cecil Carter said to her,—

"I shall leave early in the morning, and I have something of import to say to you. You no doubt understand what I mean. If you will be my wife, I will be all to you that husband can be. I will not say I offer you the first love of my heart, for I have loved before; but all that is past, and I now earnestly desire your hand in marriage. What is your answer?"

It was not just the proposal Marion had been anticipating, and for one moment she wavered. But she loved this man with all her heart, and she was tired of flirting and coqueting, and after that one irresolute moment, she put her hand in his, and then fell to sobbing violently.

"I am weak and nervous this evening," she explained, "and your sudden departure has unnerved me."

After all, it was a strange mingling of misery and happiness this proposal had brought her. She told her aunt of the engagement that evening.

"Strange," declared that estimable lady, "I could have fearlessly wagered any amount that Hilda Moss would get him away from you."

"Well, she didn't, you see!" was all Marion said in reply.

They were married in the late autumn, and Cecil is so tender and devoted a husband that Marion deems her cup of joy full.

Lady Lorton died one year after she crossed the ocean. She was terribly homesick, poor thing, and pined away, until she died. And it was better so.

And the count, who loved his fair bride better than any other thing on earth, lost his life in an Alpine accident not long after.

FACETIA.

If you wish to ascertain if a dog is a thoroughbred or a cur, kick him. If he proves to be a well-bred, self-respecting dog, you will need a new pair of trousers.

An orator said "There is not a man, woman or child in this house who has arrived at the age of fifty years but has felt this truth thundering through their minds for centuries."

"Did you make a good impression, Annette?" asked her mother. "Well, rather," returned Annette. "He tried to kiss me, and I left the print of ten pink fingernails right along his two cheeks."

"Sorry, old man, but I learned to-day that her mother objects to you!" "Good! from what I know of human nature, that will prejudice both the girl and her father in my favour. I'm a lucky dog."

"How did your banquet go off, Banhlurk?" "Not as well as it might, you know. The toastmaster called on a gentleman who had lost an arm and a leg to answer to the toast, 'Our absent members.'"

TEMPERANCE LADY: "My friend, if you don't want whisky to get the best of you, you must get the best of whisky." Promising Subject: "I do, mom, when I can; but when a feller's only got twopenny—"

CHAWLES: "Ya'as; when I was a boy, ye know I was kicked by a mule and had my brains dashed out, and the doctor—" Maud: "Sewed up the scalp without putting them back. How funny. Aw, aw!"

"Will you give me the next waltz, Miss Long?" "I wonder how you can ask it? Didn't you make some jocular remark this evening about my being so tall?" "I only alluded to you as 'sweetness long drawn out.'" "You may have the next waltz."

MISTRESS (angrily): "Bridget! What do you mean by listening outside the door?" "Share, mum, oi can't help shoppin' to listen when oi hear yer beautiful voice; it's like music, especially them high notes whin ye're blowin' up the master!"

If there is anything in this world more anxious than the look on the face of a bachelor who has been beguiled into holding a baby unaware, it is the look on the face of the baby's mother eagerly watching him while he does it.

NERVOUS GUEST (on ninth floor of hotel): "Ah, porter, in case of fire is it easy for me to get out?" Porter: "Oh, yes, sir. Take that flight of stairs at the end of the corridor." Nervous guest: "Where do they lead to?" Porter: "The roof, sir."

In Sir William Fraser's sparkling book on Disraeli and his time, Disraeli is quoted as once saying: "When I meet a man whose name I cannot remember, I give myself two minutes; then, if it be a hopeless case, I always say, 'And how is the old complaint?'"

FORCED INTO IT.—"Was it a premeditated elopement?" "Oh, no. They went driving in a buckboard, and Chappie couldn't turn it round, so, rather than have all the old women on the place gossiping because they came in after midnight, they drove on and got married."

SOCIETY.

THE Pope can speak English, German and French perfectly.

In Assyria women are sold as slaves to work with oxen at the plough.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS is said to have painted but two caricatures in his life.

LORD NELSON suffered greatly from seasickness to the end of his career.

Two hundred women are employed by Edison in working at the more delicate details of his electrical inventions.

The feather boa, which makes such a graceful addition to an evening toilet, will be as stylish as ever throughout the winter.

Some experts aver that vaseline tends to encourage what are termed "superfluous hairs" on the feminine face, if too recklessly applied as a skin softener.

The Countess of Caithness, Madame Blavatsky's successor, is extremely fond of diamonds—the only feature in which she is said to resemble her predecessor.

TEA was first sold in London in a liquid state, and then generally only taken as a sort of pick-me-up.

THE Princess of Monaco is devoted to literature and music, and numbers Blanche Roosevelt among her congenial friends. She always has a coterie of blue stockings about her.

MISS BATY ("Edna Lyall") the novelist, is interesting herself to raise a fund to redeem the late Mr. Bradlaugh's property, which is burdened with debts incurred in his parliamentary struggles.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS HENRY OF BATTENBERG's only daughter recently celebrated her fourth birthday at Balmoral, she having been one of the Queen's Jubilee grandchildren. Prince Henry returned to Balmoral for his daughter's birthday from his visit to Cluny Castle.

The Duchess of Edinburgh and her daughter, who have been staying with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Sergi at Moscow, suddenly quitted Russia a short time since, and returned to Coburg. They were the guests of the Hereditary Prince and Princess of Saxe-Meiningen during their stay at Berlin. The reason has not transpired, but there has been a great deal of gossip on the subject at Berlin and St. Petersburg, as the Duchess had gone to Russia for the winter.

THE Countess von Molke, was devoted to her husband's comfort, and while they were travelling in Italy, whose cooking the general despised, she went into the kitchen and, with her own hands, prepared all the food for their meals. The general was proud to display the big cotton apron and linen blouse which she wore on these occasions.

SYMPOTMS have recently become apparent, we are told, indicating that a distaste for deep mourning, heavy crapes, and other accepted "outward and visible signs" of the woe specially attributed to bereavement is increasingly manifest. Particularly significant of the change of feeling which is gradually supervening in this direction is the fact that of late several obituary announcements have been supplemented by an intimation to the effect that the surviving relatives "do not intend to wear black."

BALZAC, the French author, says that a woman's character finds expression in her favourite colour. A woman who prefers orange or green gowns is, he thinks, quarrelsome. Those who sport yellow hats or who go clad in black without cause are not to be trusted. White should indicate coquetry. Gentle and thoughtful women prefer pink. Pearl grey is the colour of women who consider themselves unfortunate. Lilac is the shade particularly affected by overripe beauties; therefore, according to Balzac, lilacs are mostly worn by mothers on their daughter's marriage day, and by women over forty when they go visiting.

STATISTICS.

TEN per cent. of the population of India are widows.

LAND in the City of London is worth over £2,000,000 an acre.

In forty years the sun across the Atlantic has been reduced by one-half.

TAKING the officers holding honorary rank into account, there are 2,050 generals in the British army, or one for nearly every hundred soldiers.

The population of St. Petersburg is steadily diminishing. It is less by eighty-five thousand than it was at the census taken seven years ago. No other European capital is thus decreasing.

GEMS.

"We judge ourselves," says Longfellow, "by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done."

WHATEVER upholds a man's self-respect inclines him to self-improvement, and to appreciate fully his good points goes a long way in helping him to cure his faults.

Most men work for the present, a few for the future. The wise work for both, for the future in the present, and for the present in the future.

Be not anxious about to-morrow. Do today's work only, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them.

THERE is a popular fallacy that while we can help what we do or omit doing, we cannot help what we think. Yet thought lies at the foundation of action, and no structure of just deeds can ever be safely built unless the substratum of thought be sound and firm.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

To raise the pile on velvet cover a hot iron with a wet cloth, and hold the velvet over it. Brush the velvet quickly while damp.

CHEAP PUDDING.—Boil one quart of milk with the rind of a lemon; strain and boil again. Mix one tablespoonful of flour with two of cold milk, stir in; let it boil a minute; take it from the fire, and when cool, add three eggs, beaten; sweeten to taste, and bake in crust in a quick oven.

LIVER WITH CHESTNUTS.—Boil the livers from two fowls or a turkey. When tender, mash them fine. Boil one pint of shelled chestnuts until soft. Blanch and mash them to a smooth paste. Rub the chestnuts and liver through a purée strainer. Season to taste with salt, pepper and lemon juice, and moisten with melted butter. Spread the paste on bread like sandwiches, or add enough chicken stock to make a purée. Heat again and season with salt, pepper and lemon juice.

THESE is but one way to fry onions, which will give the right result—that is to cut it in slices, and soak it in milk for at least ten minutes. Then dip the slices in flour and immerse them in boiling fat, hot enough to brown instantly a bit of bread thrown in it. You cannot keep the onions in slices, so it is not worth while to try to do so. After they have fried for six or seven minutes they may be lifted up with a skimmer on to brown paper, and will be found firm and thoroughly delicious. Cooked in this way they may be served as a garnish to a daintily broiled beefsteak, to a dish of fried chops or beef croquettes.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ALL trees are evergreen in the tropics.

ONLY three species of reptile exist in Ireland.

DURING the reign of Edward I. of England rum was sold only as a medicine in apothecary shops.

IT is claimed that the Eiffel Tower in Paris attracts so much electricity as to cause great cloudiness and an increased amount of rain in that vicinity.

THE deepest sounding yet made on the coast of Africa was off New Guinea, by H.M.S. *Challenger*, whose four-hundred pound lead struck bottom at the enormous depth of 26,700 feet.

IT has been suggested that a good way to rid a town of moths would be to set up a powerful electric light on the outskirts. The moth has an instinctive fondness for light, and especially the electric light.

IN the reign of William III. all child stealers apprehended were branded with a red-hot R for rogue, on the shoulders; M for manslaughter on the right hand, and T for thief on the left one.

THE baya bird of India spend his nights catching fire flies, with which he plaster his nest. The baya does not kill the fly, but simply attaches it to his nest by means of a piece of moist clay. On a dark night a baya's nest has the appearance of an electric street lamp.

SHORT sight is more common in town than amongst country folk, for the simple reason that townpeople have less need for long sight, they have fewer opportunities of exercising their sight on distant objects, and their occupations do not favour its development by training or selection.

WHAT is the origin of the expression "Dead as a door nail?" The door nail is the nail upon which the door knocker beats, and constant beating was supposed to have killed the nail pretty thoroughly. Shakespeare uses the saying but it is much older than his time.

THERE are one hundred and eighty-one thousand foreigners in Paris, or one-tenth of the entire population. Among these the Belgians lead with forty-five thousand; next the Germans, thirty-seven thousand; then the Swiss, twenty-five thousand; and Italians, twenty-one thousand; then comes Luxembourg, and next Great Britain with thirteen thousand.

A WRITER suggests that a large class of non-worshippers might be reached if there were mission-rooms in large towns to which those attending might bring their pipes on Sunday evenings. "Surely," he urges, "there are a great many ministers and lay-preachers who smoke, and who therefore would not find the undertaking very obnoxious; and, further, as smoking is generally conducive to thought, the men's minds would be in a good condition for thinking over what was preached to them."

A SCOTCHMAN, living in Australia, visiting his native land, carried back a thistle, the emblem of Scotland. A grand banquet was held in Melbourne by 200 Scotchmen, and the thistle, in a huge vase, occupied the place of honour in the centre of the table. It was toasted and cheered by the company, and was planted with a great deal of rejoicing. The thistle grew and thrived, and in due time its down was scattered by the winds. Other thistles sprang from the seed, and their down was scattered; and in a few years the thistle had made itself thoroughly at home in all parts of Australia. It has rooted out the native grasses on thousands, nay, millions, of acres of pasture land, destroyed sheep runs by the hundred, and caused general exoration of the Scotchman who took so much pains to import the original.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MAURICE.—It is now too late to sue for the penalty.

FIDO.—We do not understand your question.

A SYMPATHIZER.—Mrs. Maybrick is still in prison.

FIRST COUSIN.—First cousins may legally marry.

CHRISTMAS.—In 1886 the 25th December fell on a Saturday.

INQUIRER.—"Maxwell Gray" is understood to be the *nom de plume* of a lady.

INSOMNIA.—Try a wet towel to the back of the neck when sleepless.

R. T. P.—A will is invalidated by subsequent marriage. You must make a new will.

ROLAND.—The dog-House was made 5s. in 1887, and raised to 7s. 6d. in 1878.

MORTIMER.—The Bradford Reservoir, Sheffield, burst its embankment March 11th, 1884.

INQUIRER.—Address, Secretary, British South African Company, 19, St. Swithin's-lane, E.C.

CONSTANT READER.—We cannot say without knowing the rules of the society. Consult a solicitor.

CONSTANCE CARAW.—Gilt frames may be restored by rubbing with a sponge moistened in turpentine.

MYRA.—Queenstown lies to the south-west of Liverpool. The distance by sea is 284 miles.

ALICE.—The Princess Alice steamship was run down in the Thames, 3rd September, 1878.

AGGRAVATED.—If a landlord refuses to serve a customer he may be sued for damages if damage can be shown.

UNLUCKY TENANT.—If you took the house by the week, a week's notice is sufficient.

THE TOTAL.—The annual drink bill for Great Britain is about £140,000,000.

PHIL.—We know no reason why a man should not trap vermin on his own land.

INQUIRER.—A manufacturing chemist needs no license of any sort.

PUZZLED ONE.—The town of Berwick is under English law, the county of Berwick under Scotch.

IGNORAMUS.—Boxing the compass is repeating the points of the compass in their order.

LADDIN.—Glasgow stands next to London for population in the United Kingdom.

A MINOR.—Legally, a girl is under her father's guardianship until she is twenty-one years of age.

CURIOS.—A sovereign weighs 5 dwts. 15*grains* troy. Gold is never calculated by avordupois.

TIMID.—We cannot advise on hiring agreements. They must be studied before being entered into.

IRRENT.—No doubt such books are published; but we cannot name any particular one. Try a bookseller's.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—You had better apply to the matron of the nearest hospital. It is not a profession which young girls usually study for.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—You may be able to recover expenses; but the father may claim the custody of his own child at any time.

UNHAPPY ONE.—Desertion for any number of years is not a legal ground for divorce unless the husband can prove adultery.

SCOTTISH LASSIE.—Glasgow is supposed to rank about fifteenth among the cities of the world, as regards number of inhabitants.

LEO.—Gold is weighed by troy weight, and a new sovereign weighs 123 27/47 grains troy. Your problem must be worked out at home.

F. T.—The executer should not be one of the witnesses to the signature of a will which he would have to administer.

WANTS TO KNOW.—A shopkeeper is not compelled to sell any article in his shop or shop window, marked or unmarked, to any particular customer.

KIT.—Iron or steel immersed warm in a solution of carbonate of soda (washing soda) for a few minutes will not rust.

SIMPSON.—We should say that you were an annual tenant, subject to the usual six months' notice, to expire at the quarter of first entering.

CONFUSED.—Municipal Birmingham is at present entirely in Warwickshire; Parliamentary Birmingham is partly in Warwick, Worcester, and Staffordshire.

TONY.—A landlord may recover arrears of rent after the tenant has left; but he can only distrain on goods in the house in respect of which the rent is due.

FADEAURICE.—To remove a rusty screw, apply a red-hot iron to the head for a short time, the screw-driver being applied immediately while the screw is hot.

A DICKEN'S WORSHIPER.—No. Dicken's parents were in humble circumstances, and he was educated only at small private schools.

POLLY.—In absence of any agreement, a yearly tenancy is terminated by six months' notice to expire on quarter of entering.

L. F. T.—If the pensioner is emigrating, the Government may agree to purchase his pension by a sum down, generally four years' payment.

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A BIRTHDAY.

WHAT shall I do to keep your day,

My darling, dead for many a year?

I could not, if I would, forget

It is your day; and yet, and yet

It is so hard to find a way

To keep it, now you are not here.

I cannot add the lightest thing

To the full sum of happiness

Which now is yours; nor dare I try

To frame a wish for you, since I

Am blind to know, as weak to bring;

All impotent to aid or bless.

And yet it is your day; and so

Unlike all other days, one bead

Of gold on the long rosary

Of dull beads little worth to me.

And I must keep it bright, and show

That what is yours is dear indeed.

How shall I keep it here alone?

With prayers in which your name is set;

With smiles, not tears, and sun, not rain;

With memories sweeter far than pain,

With tender backward glances thrown,

And far on-lookings, clearer yet.

The gift I would have given to you,

And which you cannot need still,

Shall still be given; and it shall be

A secret between you and me—

A sweet thought every birthday new,

That it is given for your sake.

And so your day, yours safely still,

Shall come and go with abiding time—

The day of all the year most sweet—

Until the years, so slow, so few,

Shall bring me, as in time they will,

To where all years are yours and mine.

WRENKLES.—Buttermilk is about the mildest "stringent" going, and is credited with the power to remove freckles if put on the face at night and washed off in the morning.

ORANGE BLOSSOMS.—The Church service requires a ring to be placed on the woman's finger as part of the marriage ceremony. The form at a registrar's does not require a ring.

C. G.—A police-constable may require any publican to take in a dead body found near his premises. The liability of the parish to bury all bodies found within its borders is open to question, and we cannot undertake to answer it definitely.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—You had better just write to the Canadian Commissioner, 9, Victoria-chambers, London, S.W., giving the name of the town where your relative died, and requesting the name of the official to whom you should write for certificate. If you send a postal order for 5s. to Canada that will cover all expenses.

POPPY.—The word *yeoman* is little used in the United States, unless as a title in law proceedings and instruments, designating occupation. In England a *yeoman* is a man of respectable class, next below the *gentry*; a *freeholder*; an officer in the queen's household, of a middle rank between a *gentleman* and a *groom*.

CLARE.—A mistress has no right to detain a box belonging to a servant who is away through illness; but she is not obliged to send the box in answer to letters asking her to do so. If, on personal application, the box is refused, a summons for unlawful detention may be taken out.

E. G.—Our answer, and we believe your question, referred to the race known as the "St. Leger," which is rightly pronounced "Saint Leger." There is St. Leger, the family name of Viscount Donoreille, and that, we think, is commonly pronounced as "Sellinger"; but that was not your question.

NAVEOUS BRIDEGROOM.—Customs, of course, differ in different places. As a rule, at a quiet home evening wedding, to which only immediate relatives are invited, it is best for the groom to wear a Prince Albert in preference to a dress suit. According to the present fashion, gloves are seldom worn at any ceremony or entertainment which is not of a formal and dressy kind.

E. MEYERS.—High-thinking, or constant use of the brain in any direction, calls for a plain but nourishing diet. Brain-workers especially ought to live sparingly. Luxurious feeders require much exercise in the open air and freedom from pressure on the brain. For the aged, or even for those above fifty, luxurious living and over-eating are especially dangerous. As functional activity lessens with increasing years, the supply of food should be decreased accordingly. The hardest races live on the simplest fare. Frugality in diet—i.e., a minimum amount of the right quality—serves far more certainly to prolong life, insure health and well-being, than a rich abundance and variety, which is accountable in a large measure for the ill-health and dissatisfaction of the present time.

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